25¢
July 15th
Adventure
W. C. TUTTLE . ROBERT CARSE . HUGH PENDEXTER
SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL . W. TOWNEND . and others

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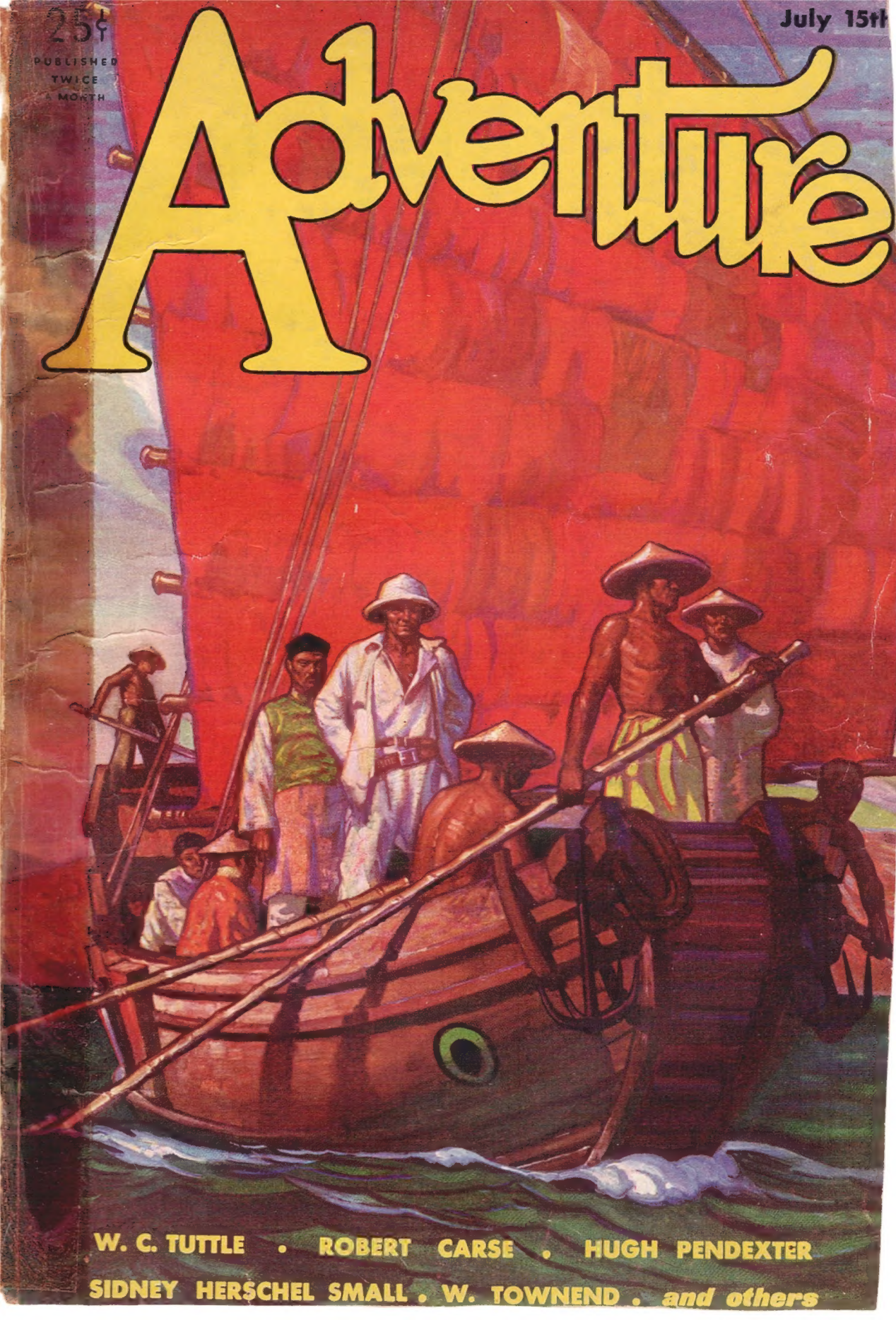

W. C. TUTTLE • ROBERT CARSE • HUGH PENDEXTER
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FLIMSY EVIDENCE

A NOVELETTE

By W. C. TUTTLE

CHAPTER I

THE CATTLE BUYERS

SHORTY WOODS was worried, angry and in pain. He was propped up in a hotel bed, badly in need of a shave, scowling at the chambermaid who was tidying up the place. A daily newspaper was scattered over the bed, along with cigaret ashes, a notebook and a pencil with a broken point.

"Ye don't need to be yelpin' at me," reminded the maid, without looking at Shorty. "Ye wouldn't go to no horspital and ye won't have no nurse. It seems to me that whin anny one gets shot twice through their limbs—"

"Legs!" roared Shorty. "I'm no tree."

"The doctor said that if ye got violent I was to send wor-rd and he'd—"

"Listen to me, will you?" wailed Shorty. "All I want is a knife."

"To finish the job, by anny chance?"

"To sharpen a pencil!"

"Oh!" The maid, who was maid in occupation only, turned and looked him over severely. "I dunno," she said. "Crazy people are allus lookin' for a chance to—"

"Wait a minute," begged Shorty calmly. "Bring me my small valise out of that closet. Ask me what I want and I'll tell you I want my six-shooter. Who do I want to shoot? You'd be surprised and pained."

"Ye're delerious, man."

"Delerious, hell! Bring me that Gideon Bible over there, and I'll swear on it to my absolute sanity—before I shoot you."

"What's all the shootin' about?" inquired a voice at the doorway.

in a New Range Mystery

Shorty craned around as far as his injuries would permit, which was sufficient for him to gaze upon two men—cowboys in store clothes, except for the high heel boots and big Stetson hats; cowboys, who grinned upon him in his distress.

One of them was so tall he had to stoop to pass through the doorway. His long, lean face was twisted in a smile as he rubbed his chin with the ball of his left thumb. The other man was shorter, heavier, with a grin wrinkled face and wide, inquiring blue eyes. Both were as bronzed as a white man may get in Arizona.

Shorty stared at them for perhaps a dozen seconds. That is, he stared between blinks of his eyelids.

"You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" asked the tall one.

"Sufferin' Christmas!" snorted the injured man. "Hashknife Hartley, is that you, or am I seein' things?"

"You never was in your right mind," said the short one.

"Sleepy Stevens, you—!" Shorty hammered on the bedclothes. "C'mere, you couple of— Well, dang my sister's black cat's uncle!"

The two cowboys shook hands seriously with Shorty, who turned to the maid.

"Get out of here, will you?" he asked. "You stick around here and you'll prob'ly hear somethin' that would make you blush."

"Not after lookin' after your room for three days, I wouldn't," she retorted, and went out, carrying a bundle of dirty linen.

"There's a lady for you," sighed Shorty.

"Not for me," replied Sleepy.

"Take it or leave it." Shorty grinned. "But what I want to know is how in hell you two ever found me here?"

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Sleepy. "Down at a pool room, a feller told us that a damn fool by the name of Shorty Woods got shot three days ago and was bein' kept alive in this hotel."

"Might have been another Shorty Woods."

"Mebbe it runs in the family." Hashknife smiled.

"What runs in the family?"

"Bein' a damn fool. But outside of that, what are you doin' down here in Arizona, and what have you been doin' since we seen you last?"

"Wait a minute," said Shorty. "What was I a-doin' when you seen me last?"

"You was a detective on the Seattle police force. That was about five years ago."

"Wrong again, Hashknife; it was seven years ago—the last year I was with the police. It took 'em three years to discover that I didn't know anythin'. Anyway, it wasn't a good job. After I quit there, I went back on the eastern Oregon range for a year or so. Bossed an outfit for awhile, but they was losin' money all the time. Eastern layout. Sold out and left me without a job.

"But about that time I got in with Bradley & Jones, Kansas City, as a buyer. Ever since then, I've been buyin' stuff for 'em all over the Northwest. They're a good outfit, but you deliver or quit. Well, I delivered all right, and when they had trouble with their buyer down here, they transferred me. I understand that their former buyer played a crooked game down here.

"Anyway, the firm got out cards to all the cattlemen in these parts, sayin' that Shorty Woods would be along soon to buy their little dogies, and down I came, follerin' the cards. The hell of it is, I've got to pick up an extra shipment at Rincon right away—and me with two bullets in the legs. In one leg, to be exact."

"Don't your firm know you've been shot?" asked Hashknife.

"Listen, pardner," said Shorty, "if I sent them a wire sayin' I had been shot, it would take twelve Senators and a couple of Congressmen to prove to their satisfaction that I was innocent. Even if I could prove that I really have been shot, they'd say I got drunk and accidentally shot myself. And here's the worst of it, Hashknife: I'm engaged to be married as soon as this trip is over. No job, no bride. Now can you see what I'm up against?"

"You always was a pretty fair drinker," reminded Sleepy.

"And they know it, Sleepy."

"Outside of that, how did you get shot?" queried Hashknife.

"Absolutely no reason for it," declared Shorty. "I don't know a soul here in Tucson—not a soul. I got here in town, and there was a message from the firm sayin' for me to wait for a feller from Rincon; a seller, I reckon. He was to meet me at this hotel—"

Shorty paused and smiled painfully.

"WELL, I went out to see what the town looked like, and I had a few drinks here and there. No, I didn't get stricken—jist exhilarated. This kept up until about ten o'clock that evenin', when I decided to come back and go to bed. I'm on my way back, kinda hummin' a tune—you know how I mean."

"No," replied Hashknife gravely. "I never drink. But go ahead."

"When did you quite drinkin'?" demanded Shorty.

Hashknife looked at his watch carefully.

"It was about half-past three," offered Sleepy. "A few minutes either way won't make no difference. Go ahead, Shorty. I'll betcha you wasn't hummin'; you was singin'. Anybody would shoot you."

"No, I wasn't singin'; I was hummin'."

"Let him tell it," advised Hashknife. "If he really had been singin' they'd have shot him higher. Always shoot a hummer in the legs."

"All right," grunted Shorty painfully, as he tried to shift his position. "I was comin' around the corner down there, and the light wasn't very good. I bumped into a man pretty hard and almost fell down, but I grabbed a post and stayed up. I intended to apologize, but he shot me twice before I could open my mouth.

"Man, them bullets shore upset me. I didn't feel 'em at first, but by the time the crowd and the police got there, I shore knowed I'd been hit. They took me to a little hospital and cut my pants off, but they didn't need to do any lead minin' on me, 'cause the bullets went plumb through—both about six inches above the knee. One of 'em almost got the bone.

"After they got me patched up, I insisted on bein' brought here to the hotel. I don't want the firm to know—and what can I do? If I can't get over to Rincon and buy them cows, I'm sunk. Oh, yeah, there was a telegram from the feller I was to meet. He couldn't get over here, but he wants me right away."

Shorty had the folded telegram in his notebook. It had been sent from Rincon, Arizona.

SORRY AM UNABLE TO MEET YOU IN TUSCON STOP HAVE NOTIFIED YOUR FIRM I CAN FILL THAT SPECIAL ORDER STOP COME AND GET THEM

—R. E. RENTON—RINCON

"As I understand it," explained Shorty, "this Renton is the big cowman of that range and owns the Flyin' V brand."

"You never met Renton, eh?" said Hashknife.

"Wouldn't know him from a fresh hide," declared Shorty.

"How long are you goin' to be on the shelf?"

"The doctor wasn't sure—but long enough to lose my job. And—" Shorty sighed mournfully—"I'll also lose a chance to get married. Hashknife, I've got the sweetest girl in the world. She'll come down from Pendleton the minute I say the word and send the money. But if I ain't got no job—aw, hell!"

"Leg hurt you?" asked Sleepy.

"Leg pains ain't so bad."

"If you was able to go over to Rincon and make that deal, how much time could you kill after that before the firm would descend upon you, Shorty?" asked Hashknife.

"Enough to let me git on my feet. Why, I could stall a lot. You can always to do that, except in a case like this, where the seller has told the firm his stuff is ready and waitin' for the buyer. I'm stuck."

"Are you goin' to quit drinkin' when you get married?"

"I shore am. After I'm married, I can't take a chance on losin' my job. If you could see that little girl—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Sleepy. "Shorty, you ain't marryin' no *girl,* are you?"

"Well," confessed Shorty, "she's thirty-four. But you'd never guess it. I'm only forty."

"Thirty-four is all right for you," said Sleepy, "even if you'd never guess it. And if you can love her, shave every day, quit drinkin', quit playin' poker and stay home nights—I'd say marry her by all means, because you need a keeper."

"Aw, what do you know about love and marriage?"

"Well, I'm still single, ain't I? And the girls I've had!"

"Sleepy—" Hashknife laughed—"is jist like a little typhoid germ that's lost its punch. He jist hops from one to another, but never takes."

Shorty's laugh was followed with a deep sigh.

"It's shore been wonderful to find you boys here. I don't know of any two fellers I'd rather meet any place. But I can't hardly laugh. No, it ain't the two holes in my legs—it's that job and the girl."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Shorty," said Hashknife seriously. "I never like to see an unhappy cowboy, even if he's an ex-cowboy. If you want to take the chance, I'll go down to Rincon, play that I'm Shorty Woods long enough to put over that deal. They don't know either of us in Rincon—and I've bought plenty cows before."

"My Gawd, would you do that?" blurted Shorty. "You ain't jokin'?"

"If you're willin' to take that chance."

"That's no chance, and it would shore mean a lot to me. Are you shore you ain't jokin' me, Hashknife?"

"I never joke with cripples. But, Shorty, do you know of any reason why somebody should shoot you?"

"Hell, no! It was either a mistake, or the other feller was crazy. Why, I never even seen what he looked like, and the police never saw him. I figure he was lookin' for somebody about my size, and when I bumped into him he jist let fly at me a couple times."

"All right. Sleepy, you go down to the depot and buy a couple tickets to Rincon. Find out when we leave, and while you're gone I'll get all the dope from Shorty."

"Let me pay for the tickets," said Shorty. "That's the least I can do."

"After we buy and ship them cows." Hashknife laughed.

"Aw, I know you'll do it, Hashknife. I've never known you to start to do anythin' and fail on the job. I got plenty expense money."

"All right. And as soon as that deal is finished, we'll come back here and give you back your credentials."

"That's great. Now if Sleepy will git his grinnin' face out of here, I'll settle down and give you all the dope on Shorty Woods' job."

CHAPTER II

SMOKY GETS DRUNK

JERKY GILLIS was nearly seven feet tall and built like a slat. His face was long and serious, etched with the lines of sixty or more Summers, which he admitted, and some he had possibly overlooked. Jerky had been a Texas Ranger, mule skinner, trail herder, and was yet one of the best cowboys in the country. His eyes, seldom discernible under his beetling brows, were a faded blue. His nose was long. That is, it had originally been long, but several breaks had kinked it badly.

Smoky Hill, christened Gerald, was barely twenty, and just six months removed from Pittsburgh. Smoky was a clean looking youngster, addicted to fancy cowboy clothes, a pearl handled gun and the highest heels in the Rincon country.

For a youngster but six months away from a city, Smoky was doing quite well. He and Jerky Gillis had been arrested for stealing a calf, and were now facing their preliminary hearing. Old Judge Evans, a wise old cow country jurist, looked at them over the top of his glasses. The room was comfortably filled with cowboys and cattlemen.

Moose Raney, the half-pint sized sheriff, acting as bailiff, swore Smoky, who took the stand. A murmur of laughter annoyed the judge when Smoky gave his occupation as cowpuncher. He looked severely at the crowd and admonished them softly. Then he asked Smoky to tell his story.

"I don't know where to start, your Honor," said Smoky.

"Start in with the first drink," prompted Jerky.

Smoky flushed as he caught the eye of Uncle Hoddy Hill, his real uncle.

"Well, we got drunk," said Smoky.

"We?" queried the judge.

"Jerky and me. It was the first time I ever got drunk, and I'm just a little hazy over what really did happen. I remember we were out near the loading corral at the railroad, and a calf was bawling. It seems that Jerky and me felt badly about that poor little calf, and Jerky said it was a shame for anybody to take a calf that young away from its mother.

"If I remember rightly, we cried about it. And after that we took the calf out of the corral. It seems that we had an idea of finding its mother, but just how we were going to do this I don't know. We both tried to take the calf on our horses—I remember that. My horse threw me off, with the calf in my arms.

"Then we took the calf into a saloon with us. Yes, I remember that much of it. But really, Judge, the rest is too hazy for me to tell you just what did happen."

"What brand was on that calf, Mr. Hill?" asked the judge.

"I'm not sure. Jerky said there were three V's on its hip."

The crowd laughed. It was a Flying V calf—and only one V was in the brand. Smoky was excused, and Jerky sworn. As he sat down he said quickly—

"Jerky Gillis, past sixty, Tumblin' H outfit, cowpuncher."

"You heard Mr. Hill's testimony, Mr. Gillis," said the judge. "Can you add anything?"

"Yeah, I can," replied Jerky seriously. "If I ever find Bob Renton with his head caught, I'll kick his pants up around his neck so danged tight they'll choke him to death."

Bob Renton, owner of the Flying V, sprang to his feet, but the judge crashed his gavel down on the desktop. Renton hesitated, glared at Jerky and sat down.

"That wasn't what I asked you, Mr. Gillis," said the judge.

"Well, I added it, Judge." Jerky grinned. "And I'll do her, too. If all the dirty dry-gulchers in this country was laid end to end, anybody would recognize him."

"Wait a minute, Jerky!" snorted the sheriff. "This is a court, not a saloon. Confine yourself to answerin' questions. Your personal opinions of the plaintiff don't interest us none."

The judge shuffled some papers, studying them with lowered head. He had a sense of humor, which is not at all becoming—at times. His face was set in grim lines as he looked at Jerky again.

"Mr. Gillis, can you tell us what happened to that Flying V calf?"

"Well, I fell on the damn thing, Judge. You know how it is when a feller gets drunk, Judge. Me and the kid both tried to pack the calf on our horses. He got throwed off, and we had a awful time catchin' the danged calf again. I reckon I was drunker'n Smoky was, 'cause I wasn't able to git on my horse with the calf.

"It was Smoky's idea that we ride close together, him packin' one end of the calf and me packin' the other."

Jerky broke into a gale of hearty laughter.

"You try it sometime, Judge! I dunno what happened, except that I fell off my horse and landed on the calf."

"Did that kill the calf?"

"I dunno, Judge. Mebbe it didn't kill it right away, but I reckon it kinda hurried the calf to its doom. Me and Smoky got the calf, and we was goin' around lookin' for a pul—pul—"

"Pulmotor," said Smoky.

"That was it. But we didn't find any, and then Smoky wanted to make a—a—what was it, Smoky?"

"Blood transfusion," said Smoky.

"I didn't know what that was," continued Jerky, "but Smoky said it was the thing to do."

"I have been told that the calf was dead when you dragged it into the

Double Eagle Saloon," said the judge.

"Well, I've told you all I know about it," said Jerky.

The judge penciled a few notations, shading his face with his hand. Finally he lifted his head.

"It seems that the Flying V outfit had a hundred head of calves in the loading pens, ready for shipment to a designated place in Wyoming. It also seems that Jerky Gillis and Smoky Hill, somewhat under the influence of liquor, and with a maudlin intent, did remove one of those calves and attempt to return it to its mother. In the attempt to restore this offspring to its mother, one or both of the defendants in this case fell upon said calf, causing its demise."

The judge lifted his eyes and looked at Bob Renton.

"And now," he said slowly, "both men admit that they did this. It has been brought to my notice that the complainant in this case knew the true facts, but still brought a charge of cattle rustling against the defendants— Oh! By the way, who got the calf?"

"The Flyin' V—Bob Renton—got him, Judge," replied Jerky.

"That's more than he's entitled to!" snapped the judge. "Any man with no more sense of humor, no more sense of proportion than the plaintiff in this case has shown, a dead calf is more than his due. Gentlemen, this case is dismissed."

BOB RENTON was angry. Not only had his charges been ruthlessly dismissed, but he had been humiliated in public. Renton considered himself a big man in the Rincon country, and this humiliation was almost more than he could bear.

Renton was not a big man physically. He was of medium height, slender, sharp of features. His hair was gray at the temples, but the rest of it was coal-black. He had calculating greenish gray eyes and a thin lipped mouth, partly concealed by a small mustache.

Bob Renton was not as popular with the cowboys—even his own—as he might have been. He was inclined to be sarcastic, domineering and superior in every way, which the boys silently resented.

His remarks about the judge were very uncomplimentary as he left the courtroom. Uncle Hoddy Hill and his wife, known to every one as Aunt Abbey, were in front of the building, talking about the trial, as Renton came out.

Uncle Hoddy was a little dried-up man, with badly bowed legs, a hawk-like face lightened by a pair of kindly blue eyes, which smiled out upon a world that had never given him an even break. Aunt Abbey was a tiny gray haired lady, her face heavily lined, but with a welcoming smile for everybody. She was born on the range, and her vocabulary was of the cattle country.

"The judge must be a friend of yours, Hill," said Renton.

"Not 'specially, Renton. His decision was just."

"Just! Some day I hope to see a decent judge on that bench. And I'm telling you something right now, Hill—"

"Wait a minute!" snapped the old man. "You're not tellin' us anythin'. Not a dern thing. You've given me a dirty deal ever since you bought the Flyin' V, and right now I'm packin' war medicine. You keep the buyers away from me, tryin' to break me. Now, I want you to git what I'm sayin': I'm through listenin' to a coyote like you."

Renton stepped back hastily as the old man faced him, legs braced far apart, right hand, shielded by his coat, grasping something inside the waistband of his pants.

"One move from you and one of us gits blotted out," rasped Uncle Hoddy.

Renton's laugh was shaky.

"I'm no gun fighter," he said.

"You've got a gun in your holster, Renton. Drag it. I want a chance to drill you. Put up or shut up, dang you!"

Renton turned on his heel and walked away. The old man glared after him, apparently in a baffled rage. Then he

turned to his wife, who was convulsed with mirth.

"Whatcha laughin' at?" he demanded hotly.

"You, Hoddy."

"Me?" He relaxed curiously. "Why are you laughin' at me, ma?"

"You bluffin' old sinner. What would you have done if Renton had reached for his gun—yanked your shirt out of your pants?"

Uncle Hoddy drew a deep breath, and a smile twisted his old face.

"Well, it worked, ma. Dawgone him, I shore was mad."

"You should have more patience, Hoddy. Job had patience."

"That Bible feller? Oh, yeah. But dang him, he never had to buck the Flyin' V outfit. I tell you, from now on I'm packin' a gun."

"I wish you wouldn't, Hoddy."

"Well, wouldn't you rather have me die with a gun in my hand than with a handful of woolen undershirt and a couple buttons?"

"Well, it would look better. We better be gettin' home. I've got sponge to set, or we won't have no bread tomorrow. I wonder where Smoky went."

"That blamed kid! He'll drive me to drink, I tell you."

"Don't use that for an alibi, Hoddy."

"Well, him and Jerky is goin' to git into serious trouble. Jerky's learnin' him to draw and shoot. Dang Jerky; he thinks you ain't a man until you can shade a second with your first shot."

"Jerky means well, Hoddy."

"Yea-a-ah! Smoky ain't got range brains. A kid like him learnin' to use a six-gun is jist like a nation that builds up a crack army. They've gotta go out and take a smack at somebody, just to see if they're as good as they think they are."

"Well, never mind Smoky; let's go home."

"I thought you was wonderin' where he was."

"I was, but I never asked for any speech."

SMOKY had gone to the sheriff's office after the hearing, and the sheriff had returned his gun. Moose, in spite of his size, was a capable officer, hard as the desert hills, but he had a sense of humor.

"If I was you, Smoky, I'd saw the barrel off this gun and throw the handle-end into the creek."

"That gun cost me forty dollars," replied Smoky.

"I know it did. But if you ain't careful it'll cost you a lot more than that. You're young, Smoky, and you're a tenderfoot. You ain't got enough *sabe* of things to keep your horns pinned back. Take my advice— Let whisky and six-guns alone."

"I'm through with whisky," said Smoky wryly. "That's bad stuff. But I'm not going to hang up my gun. Renton says this range isn't big enough for both outfits. I tell you, he's almost broke Uncle Hoddy. Before Renton came here uncle sold all his stuff to Bradley & Jones. But after Renton came in here, the buyer quit seeing Uncle Hoddy. He told me all about it and I wrote a letter to Bradley & Jones, telling them just what their buyer was doing here.

"Uncle Hoddy didn't want to sign the letter, but he finally did. That was over a month ago. Then we got a letter from that firm, saying that things were being investigated. In my letter I said that Renton cut his prices far below the market. Uncle Hoddy said I couldn't prove it, and I guess I couldn't. But, anyway, the other day we got a card from Bradley & Jones, saying that a new buyer by the name of Shorty Woods would be along soon. A new man might give Uncle Hoddy a chance, you see."

The sheriff smiled slowly.

"I hope so," he said. "In the meantime, don't get an itchin' trigger finger, Smoky."

Uncle Hoddy's attitude had been a distinct shock to Bob Renton. He went to the Double Eagle Saloon to get a

drink, and met Frank Kemp at the bar. Kemp was a lawyer with a gambling complex. About fifty years of age, lean as a greyhound and keen as a fox, Kemp was as able to bring tears to the eyes of a dealer as he was to the eyes of a jury. He was Renton's legal adviser, but had been away from Rincon when Renton caused the arrest of Smoky Hill and Jerky Gillis.

"Old Hoddy Hill threatened to shoot me awhile ago," said Renton confidentially.

Kemp toyed with his glass thoughtfully and motioned for the bartender to serve Renton.

"No doubt he would do just that," he said. "I've told you before that Horace Hill will only be goaded so far. I expected such a verdict. You made a fool of yourself, Renton."

"All right," growled Renton. He tossed off a glass of liquor.

"Any answer to that wire to Bradley & Jones?" asked Kemp.

"No. I'll wire them and quote a price. If that buyer don't show up, maybe they'll buy by wire. I guess I'll go and get the mail, and I'll send the wire on the way out."

As Renton crossed the street, Hashknife, Sleepy and the sheriff came down from the depot. Hashknife and Sleepy turned in at the Rincon Hotel, and Renton joined the sheriff.

"Who are the strangers, Moose?" he asked.

"I just met 'em at the depot," replied the sheriff. "The tall one is Shorty Woods, a cattle buyer."

"The buyer for Bradley & Jones?"

"Yeah, I guess he is," replied the sheriff, and walked on down the street to his office, where he found Smoky Hill talking with Speck Magee.

"That new buyer for Bradley & Jones jist got in, Smoky," said the sheriff. "He's at the Rincon Hotel, and if I was you I'd see him before Renton does."

"Thanks very much, Sheriff," said Smoky. "I'll go up there right now."

Hashknife and Sleepy had barely reached their room when Smoky came in.

"Are you Mr. Woods, the new buyer for Bradley & Jones?" asked Smoky anxiously.

"I reckon I am." Hashknife smiled. In spite of Smoky's cowboy garb, it was not difficult for the two men to see that their visitor was not a range bred youngster. "What can I do for you?" asked the tall cowboy kindly.

"I—I want you to give Uncle Hoddy a chance," replied Smoky.

"Uh-huh." Hashknife looked the boy over keenly. "Jist who is Uncle Hoddy, and what kind of a chance does he need?"

Smoky fairly bubbled over in his eagerness to explain things. It was made plain that Renton had offered inducements to the former buyer, thereby preventing this Horace Hill from disposing of his stock. Smoky explained about his letter to the firm, and their reply. Hashknife smiled to himself to think that this tenderfoot had in all probability been the cause of the old buyer's losing his job. It also explained why the real Shorty Woods had been transferred.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Hashknife. "I'll see Horace Hill. I'm not bound to buy from Renton."

"Gee, that's great!" Smoky's eyes sparkled. "You look like a square shooter."

"Thank you." Hashknife returned the compliment, by adding in a friendly tone, "And I think you've told me the truth."

Smoky was puzzled.

"Why, I wouldn't have any reason for lying to you."

"Pardner—" Hashknife smiled—"when you've lived in the range country as long as I have, you'll find out that men don't have to have a reason to tell lies."

Smoky's laughter was serious.

"Well, thanks, anyway," he said. "I'll not bother you any longer today, and—"

SOME one knocked heavily on the door, and Sleepy stepped over to open it. The caller was Bob Renton. He looked keenly at the two men, then shifted his gaze to Smoky.

"Which of you is Shorty Woods?" he asked.

Hashknife stepped out, but did not say who he was. Renton looked at him for a moment.

"My name's Renton," he said. "I own the Flying V outfit."

"Well?" queried Hashknife.

"You've heard of me, haven't you?"

"Yeah," said Hashknife truthfully. In fact, he had heard quite a lot about him in the last few minutes.

Renton looked at Smoky.

"What are you doing here, Hill?"

"That's part of my own business," replied Smoky, coldly.

Renton flushed angrily and turned to Hashknife.

"Is that tenderfoot kid any special friend of yours?"

Hashknife looked at Smoky for a moment before he replied.

"Not special—just a friend, Mr. Renton."

"Well, all right. I wanted to talk with you about that order for five hundred head for Bradley & Jones. When do you want 'em?"

Hashknife scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"They haven't been bought yet, have they?" he asked curiously.

"Certainly they haven't been bought. But I happen to know that your firm wants this as a rush order. I wired them that I could furnish that amount."

"Uh-huh. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Renton—I'm doin' the buyin'."

"I understand all that. You want to buy, and I've got the stuff."

"If I want to buy it," added Hashknife.

Renton was at a loss for a moment.

"Well, now, you—I don't quite understand you. I've been selling Bradley & Jones all the beef they've shipped from here for over four years, and—"

"And their buyer lost his job," added Hashknife.

Renton's jaw shut tightly for a moment.

"You see," said Hashknife, "Bradley & Jones would naturally tell a new man on this territory jist why the former salesman lost his job. They warn you once, you know."

"Well, I don't have to sell to Bradley & Jones," flared Renton.

"They know it. There ain't no law on earth that would force you to sell to them if you didn't want to, Mr. Renton. I'm here to buy beef, and it ain't Bradley & Jones' idea to favor one man more than another, as long as the stuff grades and the price is right. I'm not playin' the game the way it's been played here."

Renton thought the situation over for a few moments.

"Are you going to look at the Tumbling H stuff?" he asked.

"I expect I will, Mr. Renton."

"All right. I wish you luck, Mr. Woods."

"Thank you, Mr. Renton; I make my own luck. Goodby."

Renton walked out and closed the door ungently. Smoky's mouth drew back in a wide grin of delight. Hashknife looked at him seriously as he said—

"Young feller, you better dig up five hundred head of beef or I'll lose my job."

"We'll furnish 'em, Mr. Woods. Gee, that was a circus! I've never heard anybody talk to Renton like that."

"I suppose I'll get my big mouth slapped before I get out of Rincon." Hashknife sighed.

"I want to see somebody try it." Smoky laughed. "Well, I've got to go home and tell Uncle Hoddy about this."

When Smoky closed the door Sleepy looked thoughtfully at Hashknife.

"You're a hell of a cattle buyer," he said.

"Wait'll I buy some, won't you? Anyway, I took all the slack out of Mr.

Renton's rope. Let's go find a place to eat."

Renton went straight back to the Double Eagle Saloon, where he found Kemp, to whom he told his troubles.

"That's rather amusing," mumbled Kemp, who was quite drunk.

"What's amusing about it?" demanded Renton.

"This new buyer turning to the Tumbling H."

"It may be funny to you," growled Renton.

"I'm not laughing."

"Well, they haven't shipped any Tumbling H stuff—yet."

"No rough stuff," warned Kemp quickly. "Brains are better than six-shooters. You made a fool out of yourself today, Renton; don't make it a habit."

CHAPTER III

UNCLE HODDY LOSES A SALE

"I NEVER expected to see you," declared Uncle Hoddy, when Hashknife and Sleepy arrived at the ranch the next morning. "My luck has been so bad I never expected to see another buyer. Jerky, you saddle a couple extra broncs. Ma! Ma-a-a-a! Kill six or eight of them yaller legged chickens; we've got company for dinner. C'mon and meet ma. Jerky, you git them horses ready; we're goin' to look at cows. Smoky, will you quit grinnin' and help ma massacree hens?"

Hashknife and Sleepy grinned widely. This was their kind of folks.

As they sauntered down to the corrals Uncle Hoddy said:

"I reckon Smoky told you a lot of things. He's a talkin' fool, that boy. But he means awful well. Me and ma shore think a lot of that kid. Jist comes out here from the city and digs right into things. Nervy as a young bobcat. Yessir, Smoky is all right."

"Well, he did tell us a few things," said Hashknife.

"Well, I dunno. The way things was goin', I'd be busted flat in another six months. You can't keep on raisin' cows if you can't sell. Bradley & Jones is a big outfit. In fact, they've kind of got an exclusive on things out here. Most other buyers keep away."

"Renton kinda undersold the market, didn't he, Hill?"

"I'll betcha he did. And I'll also betcha that Bradley & Jones paid full market price. Somebody got a nice cut of that money."

"I guess that was the trouble. When Smoky wrote that letter to Bradley & Jones, it started things."

"Smart kid, that Smoky." The old man grinned. "Educated. Hell, he can tell you what ten times ten is without countin' his fingers or usin' a pencil. Jerky! He-eey! Len'then out them stirrups as far as they'll go; this man's got legs."

"I looked at 'em," drawled Jerky. "And he ain't *all* legs, either."

It was noon when they got back, and the table was supporting more fried chicken than either of the boys had seen in many a day. Hashknife had checked up on enough first grade stuff to know that the Tumbling H could easily fill the special order. Shorty had told Hashknife when the cars were to be spotted at Rincon, and Uncle Hoddy had promised to load in two days.

As soon as they got back to Rincon they investigated and found that the cars were all ready for them. The agent gave Hashknife a telegram addressed to Shorty Woods.

SPECIAL ORDER DELAYED TOO LONG PLEASE CANCEL STOP GO BACK TO SEATTLE AND WAIT FOR ORDERS STOP AM PUTTING A NEW MAN ON THE SOUTHERN TERRITORY.

—BRADLEY

Hashknife whistled softly and handed the telegram to Sleepy, who swore angrily as he handed it back. Hashknife turned to the agent and showed him the telegram.

"We won't need them cars," he said.

The agent glanced at the telegram and nodded.

"I'll fix that up for you," he said.

Hashknife thanked him and they walked back down the street.

"Do you reckon Shorty will lose his job over this?" asked Sleepy.

"I'm not worryin' about Shorty; I'm worryin' about Hoddy Hill. Gee, this is shore goin' to hit him hard. Twenty-five thousand dollars all gone up in smoke; and the next buyer might play the game with the Flyin' V. Sleepy, I hate to have to tell him—I shore do."

They walked down to the sheriff's office and found him working at his desk, while stretched on a cot at one end of the office was Speck Magee, the deputy. Speck was over six feet tall and would weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. Speck's snore had all the variations from the tremolo of a flute to the grunt of a grizzly.

"Don't mind him," said the sheriff. "He was over to Washout to a dance last night. Speck is like one of them phonographs—he absorbs music. He's doin' a two-step now. After awhile I'll kick the cot, and he'll do a waltz for us. How's the cattle buyin' comin' along?"

Hashknife let him read the telegram, and then explained that he had accepted Tumbling H cattle.

"Well, that's shore tough on Hoddy Hill," said the sheriff. "If he don't have the worst luck! My, I'm sorry about that."

"What was the trouble between Renton's outfit and the Tumblin' H the other day?" asked Sleepy. "Wasn't there a trial?"

The sheriff's explanation of the arrest and the hearing was told in a humorous vein, and it amused Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Renton was awful mad." The sheriff grinned. "He hopped on to Hoddy Hill, and Hoddy come dang near shootin' him. Renton told me he was goin' to get Hill's hide, and I told him that was one hide he better leave alone."

"What the hell's all this pow-wowin' about?" demanded Speck, breaking off in the middle of a deep snore. "Can't-cha let a feller sleep? Hides! Cow covers! Who the hell started this argument, anyway?"

Speck's eyes were closed tightly as he groped at his vest pocket.

"Moose, you Kansas sunflower, didja steal my Durham?" he asked plaintively. "You little bat eared— Oh, here you are! Who put you in the wrong pocket, little nicky-teen? Moosie. Oh, Moo-o-o-osie! Where's my papers? Didja steal my— Oh, well, I'm lucky; that's all I can say for m'self."

"Always cryin' before you're hurt," grunted the sheriff.

Speck sat up on the cot and blinked sleepily. Speck had a round face, round eyes, and even his nubbin of a nose was round—and red.

"You drank too much last night," said the sheriff.

Speck considered the accusation gravely and nodded slowly.

"That's certainly wonderful," he said. "For twenty years I've been tryin' to figure out why I feel like this the next day after a dance. And you, without any experience, gives me a solution right off the reel. Moose, you're a wonder. If I had a hat on, I'd take it off to you."

"You never had no hat on when you got home this mornin'."

"I didn't? By golly, that's another solution. You know, I wondered all the time why my head was so damn cold. That was it; I didn't have no hat on. And that Stetson cost me forty dollars."

The sheriff introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Oh, you're the buyer that took Harry Rigg's place, eh?"

"I didn't know him," replied Hashknife.

"Well, don't let that git you down. It ain't none of my business, but I wish you'd look over some of Hoddy Hill's stuff. His is the Tumblin' H spread."

Hashknife explained about looking at Hill's cattle, and then let Speck read the telegram from Bradley.

"Well, can you imagine a thing like that!" snorted Speck. "Have you told Uncle Hoddy about the telegram yet?"

"No, I ain't been out there—and I shore hate it, Magee."

"Prob'ly tickle Renton stiff," grunted Speck.

"What's wrong about this Renton person, anyway?" asked Sleepy.

"Renton wants the earth with a fence around it," growled the deputy. "He thinks he's a little tin god around here. But—" Speck grinned widely—"you pull a can opener on him and see him run for a hole."

"The Flyin' V is a big spread, ain't it?" asked Hashknife.

"Biggest around here. Renton spent a lot of money on new buildin's. Yeah, he's got a lot of money invested around here. I ort to speak nice about him, I s'pose. But I can't. The only luck I can wish him is that he'd feel every day jist like I feel now."

"You drink too much," said the sheriff gravely.

"No, I don't either, Moose. It's somethin' they put in the stuff."

"Alcohol," said the sheriff.

"You're a wonderful guesser." Speck grinned. "You ort to git one of them big glass balls, tie a dirty rag around your head and charge folks a dollar a shot to tell their fortunes. If you gents ain't too squeamish, I'd like to buy you a drink; I shore need one."

UNCLE HODDY took the bad news philosophically. Aunt Abbey's eyes were clouded, but all she did was pat Uncle Hoddy on the arm. They had gone through a lot of bad luck together. Jerky Gillis was mad, and went outdoors to do his swearing. Smoky's eyes flashed.

"Renton is behind this," he declared. "He'd move heaven and earth to prevent us from selling those cattle."

"I'm afraid not, Smoky," replied Hashknife. "As a matter of fact, I don't think Bradley & Jones feel any too friendly toward Renton. I guess the delay in shipment was too much. I've got somethin' to confess to you folks; I'm not the buyer from Bradley & Jones, but I had the authority to buy those cows."

Hashknife went ahead and explained about the real Shorty Woods, and just why he had masqueraded to help Shorty keep his job.

"But that's neither here nor there," concluded the tall cowboy. "You've lost a mighty big sale, Shorty has probably lost his job and, as far as I can see, Renton is no better off. I've got to send that telegram to Shorty Woods in Tucson, I suppose."

"I'm sorry about him losin' his job," said Aunt Abbey.

"I still think Renton had a hand in this," insisted Smoky.

"Now Smoky, he couldn't," said Uncle Hoddy mildly. "Mr. Hartley has explained all that to us."

Hashknife was very thoughtful as they rode back to Rincon, and that evening he went up to the depot and wrote out the following telegram:

JACK KINNEAR, KINNEAR & CO
ST. LOUIS, MO

HELLO JACK YOU OLD COW CANNER STOP CAN YOU USE FIVE HUNDRED HEAD TWO YEAR OLD GRADED BEEF STOP WIRE ME AT ONCE

—SHORTY WOODS

The operator smiled as he checked up the cost of the wire.

"I sent them cars out today," he said.

"I'll get more if I need 'em," replied Hashknife. "Will you get that wire off tonight? I'll expect an answer before noon, and if I ain't around will you leave it with the sheriff?"

"Sure—you bet."

HASHKNIFE wandered back to the Double Eagle, where he found Sleepy and Speck playing a game of pool. The sheriff was talking with Frank Kemp, and introduced him to Hashknife.

"Mr. Woods is the buyer for Bradley & Jones," explained the sheriff.

"Well—" Kemp smiled—"I shouldn't be very friendly with Mr. Woods, because I happen to be the attorney for Renton. But I really can't hold it too much against you if you buy from somebody else."

"Well, that's a sensible way to look at it," said Hashknife. "It seems to me that the Flyin' V has had their share of sales."

"That's true, Mr. Woods. Let's have a drink."

"As a matter of fact, Bradley & Jones wired me to cancel that order," said Hashknife.

"Cancel the order? What reason did they give?"

"Too much delay. And they've ordered me back to Seattle."

"Are you from Seattle?"

Hashknife nodded.

"But I'm not goin' back up there. Too much fog."

"Yes, that's true. Well, here's luck, gents."

They drank and resumed their conversation.

"So you're not going back to Seattle, eh?" queried Kemp.

"I don't think so," replied Hashknife. "I may not work for Bradley & Jones any longer. I just sent a wire to Jack Kinnear, down in St. Louis, askin' him if he could use that shipment. You see, I used to buy for Kinnear & Company. I shore wish Jack could see that bunch of beef; I'd like to help the old man out."

"Does Kinnear & Company ever have a man making this territory?" asked Kemp.

"No, I don't reckon they do. They buy mostly in the Northwest."

"I don't remember ever meeting their buyer," said the sheriff.

"Oh, they're not as big as Bradley & Jones, but they handle good stuff. I guess Renton is pretty sore at me." Hashknife laughed. "But what made me mad was the way he jumped at me. Why, he acted as though I *had* to buy from him."

"I know," said Kemp. "Renton needs an anchor; that's why I work for him. He's cooled off now."

Kemp excused himself, and Hashknife sat down with the sheriff to watch the pool game.

"Kemp's a good lawyer," said the sheriff. "But he ain't ambitious. We wanted to elect him prosecutin' attorney, but he didn't want the job. Drinks like a fish, and he'd set at a poker table for a week. He's a mighty good poker player, too."

"Pleasant sort of a feller," replied Hashknife.

"Oh, shore; everybody likes Kemp. Your pardner is a pretty good pool player."

"Don't let him hear you say that. It's hard enough to live with him as it is."

"Uh-huh. Does he travel with you all the time?"

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"I've been waitin' for somebody to ask me that question. Let's walk down to your office, Raney; I want to tell you somethin'."

"All right—if it's somethin' you want to tell me. I plumb forgot my manners when I asked you that question."

They walked down to the office and Hashknife told his story to the little sheriff. Moose Raney had a sense of humor, and he chuckled over Hashknife's masquerade as Shorty Woods.

But when Hashknife told him his real name, the sheriff jerked back, looking keenly at him.

"Hashknife Hartley? Was you ever down in the San Miguel country—Sunset City—?"

"Couple years ago—yeah."

"Remember Chub Needham?"

"Chub Needham? Why, yea-a-ah. He was killed drivin' stage, wasn't he?"

"Chub Needham was my wife's brother. My wife's dead now, Hartley. But I heard all about the affair down there; heard about the things you done. Man, you cleaned out a bad gang—and

you got the man who murdered Chub. Mind shakin' hands with me ag'in, Hartley?"

They shook hands solemnly, then the sheriff sat back, eyeing the tall cowboy closely.

"Well, I'll be danged!" he said softly. "I've allus wanted to meet you. I've heard of you since. I had a feller in jail for stealin' a horse, and he talked about you. He said you was too damn slick for any use. Well, doggone it, I'm shore glad to meetcha, Hartley. What's your pardner's name?"

"Sleepy Stevens."

"That's the boy! I 'member it fine, now. Doggone small world! Are you goin' to let everybody know you're Hashknife Hartley?"

"No, I'm not; but I reckon they'll find out. I told the folks down at the Tumblin' H. They're real folks, Raney."

"Jist the best you ever met, Hashknife Hartley. You said you wasn't goin' up to Seattle; where are you figurin' on goin'?"

"Raney—" Hashknife smiled—"we never figure on that. Me and Sleepy just start out, that's all. There's allus a hill ahead, and that's all we ask. We want to see what's on the other side."

"That's a funny way to do, ain't it?"

"I dunno. We're just a pair of drifters, Raney. I'm originally from up in northeast Montana, and Sleepy is from Idaho. I reckon it was fate that drifted us together to the old Hashknife outfit. That's where I got my name. My folks named me Henry. Sleepy's right name is Dave.

"I dunno why it is, but I've allus had a hankerin' to see things. Sleepy had the same hankerin', and so we started out to peek over the hills. I reckon we're kinda queer; but we've seen lots of places and lots of folks. You'd be surprised at the things we've found on the other sides of the hills."

"Yeah, I reckon I would," agreed the sheriff. "But it don't pay."

"If you mean money—it don't. We ain't got as much money as we had the day we left together. But what would we do if we had money? You can't pack money on horseback. All we need is enough to feed us—we'll allus find a place to sleep. Need a pair of overalls once in awhile, mebbe a little poker stake."

"But after all, what does it git you, Hartley?"

"Well, I dunno." Hashknife smiled thoughtfully. "Mem'ries of folks we've helped, I reckon. Mebbe some mem'ries of tight places we've been. But, after all, Raney, it's our way of livin'. Mebbe we'll settle down some day. We've talked about it, me and Sleepy. Mebbe some day we'll run out of hills. There must be an end to 'em."

"Yeah, I suppose it's as good a way to live as any other."

"And you only live once," said Hashknife. "Why not live that one life to suit yourself, as long as you don't hurt anybody."

"That's right. But it's a wonder to me that you two fellers ain't been killed long ago, Hartley."

"Well, we're still goin'. But when our names come up in the Big Book—that's different."

"Do you believe there's a time marked down for all of us?"

"If I didn't, I'd shore be scared to death all the time."

The sheriff nodded thoughtfully.

"Mebbe you're right, Hartley. I never thought much about such things, but I can see where there ain't much use in dodgin' things. Have you any plans on what you're goin' to do?"

"No, not yet. We'll prob'ly take these horses back to the Tumblin' H tomorrow. There's no use stayin' around here, as far as I can see. Even a cowpuncher must work once in awhile."

SLEEPY wanted to leave Rincon the next day.

"This place is too dead to skin," he declared. "Why, I can't even find a good pool player. Speck said he was good; but I can spot

him seven of the fifteen balls and use a broomstick."

"It ain't much of a place." Hashknife yawned. "Let's go up to the depot; I'm expectin' a telegram."

The depot agent explained that he had intended bringing the message down to the hotel, but had been too busy. It was from St. Louis, addressed to Shorty Woods.

SORRY BUT WE ARE NOT IN THE MARKET FOR ANY BEEF STOP KINDEST PERSONAL REGARDS

—JACK KINNEAR

If there was any significance in that ordinary telegram, Sleepy failed to see it; but he could read the expression on Hashknife's face as he put the sheet of paper in his pocket.

"Do we leave Rincon tomorrow?" asked Sleepy.

"No-o-o," drawled Hashknife, "I don't reckon we will. Sleepy, I've jist struck a soap mine."

"Soap mine? Must be a real streak of lather."

"Correct. Do you know, pardner, I believe I'll sell some cows before we leave Rincon."

"I think you're crazy."

"I've got you beat, cowboy; I know I am."

Smoky came to town later in the day.

"Anything more about a cow sale?" he asked. "Gee, I don't know what's to be done. Uncle Hoddy and Aunt Abbey don't say anything, but I know how they feel inside. I'm as green as grass about all this range stuff, and I make all kinds of fool mistakes, but it's because I want to help them. Their hopes went up so high, and then came down with an awful dull thud."

"I reckon you're right about how they feel," agreed Hashknife. "They're both old-timers, and they won't yelp. But sometimes it does you good to yelp; kinda relieves the pressure."

"I yelp enough." Smoky smiled. "I can't be bottled up. Why, out there today I got off on a streak, using Bob Renton as my subject. I certainly told the wide world what I thought of him. And did either of them side in with me? They did not. Aunt Abbey got out the family Bible and started reading. I asked her if she was looking for some words I hadn't used, and she said something had to be done to counteract the things I had said about humanity."

"That kinda stopped you, didn't it?" asked Sleepy.

"Sure. So I saddled my horse and came to town."

Smoky ate supper with them that evening, and the three of them were sitting in front of the Rincon Hotel when a passenger train stopped at the depot. They paid no attention to it, but a few minutes later they saw a man and a woman coming down toward the hotel.

"Company comin'," observed Sleepy.

"And," added Hashknife, "the man's either drunk or got blind staggers."

The woman, or rather girl, seemed to be trying to hold him up and at the same time carry a heavy valise. Smoky sprang to his feet and went to her assistance, but the drunken man resented any assistance. The girl was undeniably pretty; but weary, judging from the tired droop of her shoulders as she placed the valise on the sidewalk.

The man was slender, gray haired, well dressed, his face heavily lined and blotched from dissipation. He waved Smoky aside.

"Lemme 'lone, will you?" he said thickly. "Don' need no help."

"May I carry that valise?" asked Smoky.

The girl sighed deeply, but shook her head as she replied—

"It is only a few steps, thank you."

"Tha's right," said the man. "Don' ask favors 'f anybody."

The girl thanked Smoky with a look, and they went into the hotel. Smoky came back and sat down with the two cowboys.

"That feller ain't had no sudden attack," said Hashknife. "He's been

drunk all his life, it looks to me."

"Gee, that girl surely looks sad about it!" said Smoky.

"She should be," replied Sleepy. "It's quite a chore, leadin' a drunk around a strange town."

Smoky waited awhile, and then went into the hotel, where he looked at the old ink spattered register.

"Mark Stillwell and Marion Stillwell," he told Hashknife and Sleepy. "Separate rooms, too. Must be father and daughter."

"Where are they from?" asked Hashknife.

"Seattle, Washington."

"Yea-a-ah? Seattle, eh?"

"Anythin' wrong about folks from Seattle?" Sleepy grinned.

"Somethin' wrong with the man, but he can't blame Seattle." Hashknife laughed.

CHAPTER IV

MURDER

"WELL, now I'll tell you what you better do," said the sheriff seriously. "Go and sober up. You look to me as though you had been drunk for a month. You're as shaky as a basket of snakes."

The man who had arrived drunk in Rincon the previous night sat in a chair in the sheriff's office at Rincon, dishevelled, unshaved. His eyes were red and his hands unsteady.

"Never mind that," he growled. "I've got a mortgage on that Tumbling H outfit; a mortgage ten years old—and not a damn cent of interest has ever been paid. Want to see it?"

"No, I don't want to see it," replied the sheriff. "It's none of my business."

"Well, I've got it. That's all I've got left in the world, and I'm going to cash in on it. To hell with everybody. That's my motto. I'm Mark Stillwell—what's left of him. I've been a good fellow. No more. Do you hear me?"

Stillwell was almost shouting his last words. The sheriff shook his head sadly. He had seen men that way before—on the verge of delirium tremens. Stillwell laughed harshly and got to his feet.

"I'm going out there and claim what is mine," he said.

"Well, I don't reckon anybody is goin' to stop you, Stillwell."

"Nobody can stop me."

He walked outside, going erratically toward the livery stable. The sheriff sighed and turned back to his work.

"Stillwell," he muttered. "That name's familiar—somehow. Ten years ago—Mark Stillwell. That's right. A millionaire—Stillwell. He came here to hunt, and lived at the Tumblin' H. By golly, that's right. That seems a long time ago. Tough on Hoddy Hill."

Smoky Hill saw Stillwell leave the sheriff's office. Smoky had come from a store to get a sack from the buckboard, and Aunt Abbey was in the store, talking with Marion Stillwell. Smoky had been introduced to her by the hotel proprietor. He went into the store and told Marion that her father had gone over to the livery stable.

"I wonder where he is going?" she said anxiously. "He—you see, he isn't—oh, I don't know how to say it."

"That's all right," said Smoky quickly. "He's been drinking too much, that's all."

"I know he has. For the last two weeks he has never sobered."

"Where do you think he is going now?"

Marion hesitated, as she looked at the old lady.

"I think he has gone out to your place," she said. "There was something about a mortgage."

The old lady stared at her for several moments.

"Stillwell," she said slowly. "Oh, I know now. I—I didn't remember—it was ten years ago. Mark Stillwell!"

Marion nodded. Smoky put his hand on his aunt's shoulder.

"What is it, Aunt Abbey?" he asked.

"The mortgage against Tumblin' H," she said slowly.

"I didn't know there was a mortgage."

"Ten years ago," said the old lady, as though talking to herself, "Mark Stillwell came here. He was a millionaire sportsman. He lived at the ranch awhile, and hunted with Hoddy. We—we needed money badly. He offered to take a mortgage for ten thousand dollars. It—it didn't seem much to him, but it was a lot to us.

"It was mighty hard to git money in them days. That money put us on our feet. Mark Stillwell left his address, and six months later we sent him the interest money. But it came back. In a year we sent the interest for one whole year, and it came back. We have never been able to locate Mark Stillwell. And now he is here."

"A seven per cent mortgage?" asked Smoky, and the old lady nodded.

Smoky whistled in amazement.

"Why, Aunt Abbey, at seven per cent for ten years, the interest alone is worth seven thousand! Is that the reason Uncle Hoddy always said he couldn't sell the ranch?"

"That was the reason, Smoky."

"Gee whiz! Why, that's terrible! I wonder if he really went out to see Uncle Hoddy?"

"He said he was going out there," replied Marion. "Oh, I wish daddy was himself again. He drinks all the time and he is so unreasonable. He even forgets that I am with him."

"Was he drunk this morning?" asked Smoky.

Marion nodded wearily.

"Oh, yes, as bad as ever. And he can't stand much more. He sits and drinks for hours from a bottle. He hates everybody and everything. Sometimes he forgets who I am and hates me, too."

"Hate is a terrible thing, Marion," said Aunt Abbey.

"I know. I only hope you won't hate me for this mortgage. It was all we had left in the world, and we only had that through accident. It was left with some other private papers for years. I believe daddy had forgotten it; he had enough happen to make him forget things, I suppose."

"Bless your heart," said Aunt Abbey, "I never hate anybody. You can't help this. But we can't pay off that mortgage. We're as poor as church mice. Everything has gone wrong lately. We haven't even got the interest money any more."

It was nearing the noon hour, and Smoky suggested to Marion that she have dinner with them. Marion was glad to accept, and they ate together. They were just finishing their meal when the sheriff came in. He stopped at the doorway and looked at them several moments before coming over to them. His eyes were very grave as he said—

"You are Miss Stillwell?"

"Yes," said Marion.

"I've got some awful bad news for you, ma'am."

"My father?" asked Marion, getting up quickly.

"Yeah—your father is dead."

"Dead? Oh, no! You don't mean that! You can't—"

"Doggone, I'm awful sorry to have to tell you thataway, but I—"

"What in the world happened to him?" asked Aunt Abbey.

"He got shot," replied the sheriff grimly. "Hoddy's down at the office now, and—"

"Hoddy didn't— No, Raney!"

"There ain't been nobody accused yet, Aunt Abbey. You-all better come down to the office. We're goin' 'out after the body."

THEY found Hashknife, Sleepy and Speck with Uncle Hoddy. The old man's face was grim. Aunt Abbey put an arm around his shoulders, and waited for some one to explain things. Marion did not weep, and Hashknife looked at her admiringly.

"Well, can't somebody say somethin'?" asked Aunt Abbey.

"The prosecutin' attorney will be here in a minute," said the sheriff. "I want him to hear what Hoddy says about it."

"Hoddy, you didn't do it."

"No, ma, I never killed him."

"That's enough for me, Hoddy."

Al Englund, the prosecuting attorney, arrived in a few minutes, and the sheriff explained things to him.

"I'm leavin' Speck here," said the sheriff, "while me and the coroner go down there after the body."

"Can you wait a minute, Sheriff?" asked Hashknife. "I'd like to hear Uncle Hoddy's story, and I'd like to go with you, too."

"All right; the coroner ain't here yet."

"Stillwell comes out to my place," said the old man slowly. "I didn't recognize him at all. It's been ten years since I seen him, and he's changed a lot. And he was drunk. Had a bottle with him, and he acted queer. He said he'd come to take the Tumblin' H away from me, on account of that mortgage. I admitted the mortgage. Why, I tried to send him the interest money, but it always come back.

"Well, he raved about everybody givin' him a bad deal, and he said that nobody could ever give him a bad deal again. He wanted me to git off the ranch right now. I tell you, I couldn't argue with him, 'cause he acted so crazy. After 'while he said he was goin' back to town and git the sheriff to throw me off the place. He took a drink, throwed the bottle at me and got on his horse.

"After he rode away, I got to thinkin' about him. I didn't know what he might do; so I saddled my horse and headed for town. I didn't know if he had a gun or not. Anyway, I was ridin' this way, and about a mile or so this side of the ranch, where that old dry wash cuts the road, I find him layin' almost in the middle of the road, and his horse is a little further along, standin' on a loose rein.

"I thought the man had fell off his horse or been thrown off, but when I got off my horse and looked him over, he'd been shot. There wasn't nobody around there. Then I got on my horse and come in to report it. That's all I've got to say."

"He had a mortgage against the Tumbling H?" queried the attorney. Hoddy nodded grimly.

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Did he show it to you, Hoddy?"

"No, he never showed it to me."

"He had it with him when he went to git his horse," said the sheriff. "He pulled it out and asked me if I wanted to see it, but I didn't."

"This is Miss Stillwell, his daughter," said Hashknife.

The attorney bowed gravely to her.

"I'm mighty sorry, ma'am," he said, and turned to Uncle Hoddy.

"You say you tried to pay him the interest on this mortgage?"

"I kept sendin' it to him, and it allus come back. It was the address he gave me—the only one I knew."

The lawyer turned to Marion.

"Miss Stillwell, I don't like to question you right now, but do you know of any reason why that interest money never reached your father?"

"I—I think I can answer that," she replied, her lips quivering. "In less than six months after my father was down here, he—he was in the prison at Walla Walla."

No one made any comment, and after a few moments she resumed:

"He was imprisoned for embezzling a big amount of money, but he was not guilty. His partner juggled the books to make it appear that daddy did it. They never got his partner—and daddy served eight long years for another man's crime."

"I reckon we can go now," said Hashknife softly. "The coroner is outside."

Doctor Reber, the coroner, had a light wagon. They rode down to the scene of the killing with him. The body was exactly as Uncle Hoddy had described it. His footprints were around the body. Stillwell had been

shot through the heart, and the bullet was still in the body. The sheriff searched the pockets, which were completely empty. The sheriff swore softly as he stood up and looked down at the corpse.

"Looks bad for Hoddy Hill, eh?" said Hashknife.

"I was hopin' we'd find that mortgage in his pocket. Damn the luck! Hoddy Hill—my friend."

"Circumstantial evidence has hung many an innocent man," said Hashknife.

"I know it has, Hartley—less evidence than this, too. Nobody to prove any alibi for him; only his story for a defense. Say! I wonder where Jerky Gillis is? He wasn't in town with Smoky and Aunt Abbey, and he wasn't at the ranch."

"You mean Jerky might have done it?"

"Jerky," said the sheriff, "is absolutely loyal to the Tumblin' H. If he knowed about that mortgage— Aw, I'm a damn fool to be talkin' like that. Let's get this body back to town. What do you think, Doc?"

"I know only what we can all see, Raney," replied the coroner.

"Cut the bullet out, Doc," said Hashknife. "Get the angle it went in, and we can see if it was shot from a man on foot or on a horse."

"I don't see what difference that makes, Mr. Hartley."

"Anyway—" Hashknife smiled—"it's the scientific way of doin' things."

They loaded the body and went back to town, where the sheriff had a talk with the prosecuting attorney.

"I'm sorry," said the prosecutor sincerely, "but we've simply got to hold Hoddy Hill. I hate it as much as you do, Raney; but duty is duty."

"I wish to hell you was sheriff, instead of me, Al," said the sheriff bitterly. "Damn it all, Hoddy is my best friend."

Jerky Gillis came riding in after the arrest had been made. He was fiercely indignant.

"I'll bust your damned old jail, Raney," he declared. "I tell you, you jist can't keep Hoddy in jail."

"Oh, cool down, will you?" retorted the sheriff. "I hate it as much as you do. Go on home."

Jerky went away, shaking his head. He found Aunt Abbey, Marion and Smoky in front of the hotel, and Smoky introduced him to the girl.

"She's goin' home with us, Jerky," said Aunt Abbey. "Her father had all their money and it was stolen off his body along with the mortgage. She's got to have some place to live while she's here."

Marion was crying, and Jerky walked away, grunting some of his choicest profanity under his breath.

"I've gotta kill somebody," he told Speck Magee.

"All right," replied Speck. "Go ahead—I'll pick up behind you."

Hashknife and Sleepy stood at a hitch-rack and watched the party leave for the ranch.

"I don't reckon we'll be leavin' here for awhile," said Sleepy.

Hashknife's gray eyes blinked thoughtfully.

"It shore looks bad for Hoddy Hill," he said.

"Ain't no way to help him, is there?"

"I dunno. I can't believe Hoddy killed that man; and still, the evidence shows he did. If he didn't there's either a lobo or a coyote loose in this country. If it's a lobo, we'll have to go easy, 'cause a lobo is a smart killer. I reckon I'll have to wait until I get a better look at his tracks."

CHAPTER V

KEMP PASSES A WARNING

THE FLYING V was by long odds the most up-to-date ranch in that part of Arizona. Renton had owned it five years, and during that time had improved it greatly. Renton had always wanted the Tumbling H ranch,

because of the water and the valuable range. He had offered Hoddy Hill a fair price for his holdings, but the old man turned it down. Renton, angry because his offer had been turned down, decided to drive Hill off the range.

It was the day after the Stillwell murder, and Frank Kemp, the lawyer, had ridden out to talk with Renton. They were sitting in the comfortable main room of the ranch-house, discussing the murder.

"Do you think Hoddy Hill murdered him, Frank?" asked Renton.

Kemp bit the end off a cigar, gripped it between his teeth and leaned back comfortably in a leather chair.

"I doubt it," he said finally. "The evidence points to Hill; and he seems to be the only person in this country who had sufficient motive to do the job. But—well, that's all I know about it."

"You say this man Stillwell was on the verge of delirium tremens?"

"According to his daughter's admissions, Stillwell had been drinking steadily for weeks. Yes, I suppose he was close to seeing snakes."

"How old is this daughter, Frank?"

"Oh, I'd say she was around eighteen. Pretty girl. By the way, I suppose you've heard that the tall, lean cattle buyer is not Shorty Woods."

Renton went to the fireplace, where he took tobacco and papers from the mantel.

"Where did you get that information?" he asked.

"I don't believe it's any secret. I heard it talked over in the Double Eagle Saloon, and I asked the sheriff about it. He said the man's name is Hashknife Hartley. Have you ever heard that name?"

"Hartley? No, I don't believe I have, Frank. What about him?"

"The sheriff knew quite a bit about him, it seems. Raney isn't a man to exaggerate, and he says Hartley is the best range detective in the country, if not in the entire West."

Renton leaned back and blew a thin stream of smoke toward the ceiling.

"That covers quite a lot of territory," he said.

"I'm only saying what Raney told me; I'm not swearing to it, Bob."

"Did he say why this man Hartley impersonated Woods?"

"He said Woods was sick. Hartley is apparently interested in this Stillwell murder. I understand he had the sheriff and coroner wait until he could hear what Hill had to say, and then went with them to get the body."

"Who hired him to work on the case?"

"Oh, I suppose it was merely curiosity."

"Did you talk with the prosecutor about the case against Hill?"

"Oh, just a few words. I don't imagine he's any too keen on prosecuting the old man."

"Where's Stillwell's daughter?"

Kemp laughed shortly.

"She's staying at the Hill ranch."

"The devil she is! That's a funny idea."

"She hasn't a dime; and she had to live somewhere. They invited her out there. We've got time to attend that inquest in Rincon, if we go in now."

"Sure, I'd like to see what is said and done."

And that same morning Hashknife sent a wire to Shorty Woods, in Tucson.

BRADLEY CANCELED ALL BUYING AND ORDERS YOU TO SEATTLE STOP YOU BETTER WIRE THEM FOR CONFIRMATION AND WIRE ME LATER STOP USE MY RIGHT NAME

—HASHKNIFE HARTLEY

THE little courtroom at Rincon was packed to suffocation, and as quiet as a tomb, when Hoddy Hill stepped down from the witness stand after telling his story to the jury. Grim faced men listened to the old man's story, but few believed him.

The sheriff testified to having talked with Stillwell, and it was his opinion

that the man had been mentally unbalanced from liquor. The coroner's testimony showed that Stillwell had been shot through the heart with a .44 caliber revolver and, judging from the angle of the bullet, the shot had been fired on a level with the target. Hashknife had examined the bullet, which had stopped against a rib, but was not battered.

There was a buzz of conversation, which stilled quickly as Marion Stillwell was called to the stand. She seemed cool and unhurried, her voice pitched low.

"Miss Stillwell," said the coroner, "we all understand just how painful this must be to you, but it is necessary."

"Yes, I understand," she replied.

"Miss Stillwell, suppose you tell us what brought you and your father to Rincon. Mr. Hill says he tried to send the interest money to your father, but it was always returned."

Marion nodded slowly.

"I think I should go back several years; so you may understand. My mother died when I was six years of age and I went to live with my aunt and grandmother. Daddy was in business in Seattle and I rarely saw him. But I knew he was becoming wealthy. When I was eight years of age, something went wrong with daddy's business.

"The newspapers were full of it. Vast amounts of money belonging to other people were missing. Albert La Rue, daddy's manager, was missing, and the papers hinted that some one had killed him. The books had been altered to show that daddy was the guilty one, and all of his fortune was taken away to pay the losses.

"The police searched for months, but were unable to find La Rue. And they sent daddy to the penitentiary for ten years. Everything we owned was gone. My grandmother died three years ago, but I still lived with my aunt. About a year ago daddy was released. My aunt believed in him, gave him money and used her influence to get him a position. But he couldn't hold a job, because he drank so heavily.

"Finally my aunt told him she would do no more for him. She gave him some old papers he had left at her house shortly after he came back from his hunting trip down here. He had forgotten them. All of them were worthless except this mortgage.

"Daddy thought it might be a chance to get some money, and after many discussions my aunt financed the trip down here, if I could come along. I think you know the rest, Doctor."

"Thank you, Miss Stillwell. But did they ever find La Rue?"

"No, he never was found."

"Did you know La Rue?"

"No, I never saw him in my life."

"That is all, thank you."

The jury was out five minutes, and asked that Horace Hill be held for trial at the next term of court.

Late that afternoon Hashknife got an answer to his wire to Shorty Woods.

> YOUR WIRE TODAY CONFIRMED BY BRADLEY STOP LEAVING FOR SEATTLE TONIGHT STOP BEST REGARDS TO BOTH OF YOU
>
> —SHORTY

"Well, that ends our connections with Shorty," said Hashknife. "I hope he don't lose his job."

"I'll bet Renton wired a lot of stuff to Bradley & Jones."

"Somebody queered Shorty, that's sure," agreed Hashknife.

They went down to the sheriff's office and Hashknife asked to examine Hoddy Hill's six-shooter. It was a .44, single-action Colt, containing four cartridges. Hoddy had explained that he only had four cartridges.

"These old peacemakers ought to shoot plumb through a man," said Hashknife.

"But that bullet hit a rib," said the sheriff.

"It laid against a rib," corrected

Hashknife. "That bullet wasn't even dubbed on the point."

"I know it wasn't."

Hashknife was sitting on the edge of the sheriff's desk, dangling the gun in his hand, when Frank Kemp strolled in.

"Do you know anythin' about ballistics?" asked Hashknife.

"Very little," said the lawyer. "What was the argument?"

"It wasn't an argument," replied the sheriff. "Hashknife has an idea that a bullet from Hill's gun should have gone all the way through Stillwell, or been battered worse than it was."

"More than that," said Hashknife, "I don't believe this gun ever fired that bullet."

"It's a .44," said the sheriff.

"That part is all right."

"On what do you base your contention?" asked Kemp.

Hashknife looked at the gun, lifted his eyes and smiled at the lawyer.

"You might say it was just a hunch."

"Oh! Well, I'm afraid a jury would give little consideration to a mere hunch, Mr. Hartley."

"Yeah, you're right—they wouldn't. Was that mortgage ever recorded in this county?"

"No, it wasn't," replied the sheriff. "I've looked. That piece of paper was worth seventeen thousand dollars to Stillwell—and men have been murdered for a lot less than that."

"Did Miss Stillwell know how much money her father had on him?"

"Less than a hundred dollars."

"I've known Hoddy Hill for a dozen years," said the sheriff, "and in all that time I've never known him to do a mean thing. But you never can tell what a man will do to protect himself."

"Humans are never reliable all the time," said Kemp.

"I guess me and Sleepy will ride out to the Tumblin' H today," said Hashknife. "I wish I knew somethin' to do to help the old man, but it's shore a blank. As far as I can see, Hoddy Hill was the only man in this country with any reason to kill Stillwell. And you've got to have a reason, you know."

"And it takes a mighty good reason for a murder," said Kemp.

CHAPTER VI

JERKY CONFESSES

JERKY GILLIS stood with his back against the doorway, looking at Aunt Abbey slumped in a rocking chair, frail and white, her hands clasped in front of her. She tried to smile at him.

"You've got to keep your nerve," he said. "You can't let this git you down. Us old-timers has gotta be tough, Aunt Abbey."

"I've been tough, Jerky," she replied. "I've taken it all with a smile. But they've taken Hoddy away from me. Why, he never killed that man no more than you did. Jerky, what have I done to deserve this?"

"Gawd, you ain't never done nothin'—except be good. Why, dawgone it, I—aw, hell!"

"Where is Marion, Jerky?"

"She's a-settin' on the porch—jist a-settin' there. She done sent a telegram to her aunt in Seattle—I s'pose it was—and they can't bury her pa until she hears from her."

"She's a nice girl, Jerky."

"Yeah, she seems to be awful nice. Aw, I wish to gosh I knowed some way to git Uncle Hoddy out of that jail."

"That's all I'd ever ask, Jerky. All I ever want in the world is to have him back with me again. We've been married forty years, and he ain't never been away more than over one night."

Jerky went softly outside. He stopped on the steps and looked at Marion, but she did not turn her head.

"I cain't help you none," he said to himself. "Gawd, sometimes a feller is plumb helpless. Might as well have rheumatism."

He went down to the corral, where he threw a saddle on a tall, snake

headed roan. He yanked the cinch tight, and the animal bit savagely at him. But Jerky didn't mind. He led the animal out of the corral, kicked the gate shut and was in the saddle before the startled animal could whirl.

The roan had only been saddled once before, and Jerky knew it was not a fit animal to ride to town; but Jerky craved violent action—and he got it. Marion came out of her reverie with a cry of alarm when that bucking roan came down past the porch, with old Jerky Gillis riding him straight up.

Gravel flew like hail against the walls of the house. Straight down through the big gateway, where Jerky flung himself sidewise to escape being caught against a gate post. The roan tried to cut off the road, but Jerky swayed ahead in his saddle, slashing the left side of the roan's head with his hat, forcing him back. They disappeared in a cloud of dust, heading for Rincon.

Less than a quarter of a mile down the road he met Hashknife and Sleepy. They gave him plenty of room, and he was too busy to speak to them as he raced past.

"Wasn't that Jerky Gillis?" asked Sleepy.

"What I could see of him, it shore resembled Jerky," replied Hashknife. "That old rawhider is some jockey, if you ask me."

"He must be goin' to town in a hurry."

"It's a cinch the horse is." Hashknife laughed.

Jerky covered those three miles in record time, and it required all his strength to pull up the roan on the main street of Rincon. He fairly flung the animal against a hitching-rack, and was off before the animal realized what was being done. He tied the roan securely and went clattering down the sidewalk to the Double Eagle, where he leaned wearily against the bar.

"Whisky," he ordered hoarsely.

He poured out a stiff drink, and grabbed at the bottle when the bartender started to take it away.

"Leave her lay as she is," he ordered. "I'm hankerin' for whisky."

"I thought you wasn't goin' to git drunk no more, after what happened to you and Smoky and the calf," said the bartender, grinning.

"I'm drinkin' enough to last me a long time, pardner."

Drink after drink went down his throat. After he had downed eight, he sang a little song to the bartender. Jerky's voice was not so good, but his intentions were of the best. Four more drinks, and he seemed to sober.

"That's all I can stummick," he told the bartender. "Another one, and I couldn't talk straight. *Adios.*"

Jerky lurched away from the bar, walked steadily out of the saloon and headed straight for the sheriff's office, where he found the sheriff and the prosecuting attorney. As far as outward appearances were concerned, Jerky was sober as any man could be.

"Hello, Jerky," said the sheriff. "Want to see Hoddy?"

Jerky's lips twisted painfully as he drew out his six-shooter and laid it on the sheriff's desk.

"There's m' gun," said Jerky. "This has gone far enough."

"What do you mean?" asked the sheriff in amazement.

"I shot Stillwell—that's what I mean."

"You shot Stillwell? Jerky, do you mean that?"

The old rawhider's face twisted in a bitter smile.

"Would a innercent man run his neck into a rope for fun?"

"Sit down, Gillis," said the prosecutor. "You've got to explain things to us. Why would you shoot Stillwell?"

"Why? On account of that damn mortgage, that's why. I was there at the ranch, and I heard Stillwell ravin' at Hoddy. I knowed about that mortgage before. Me and Hoddy talked about it. So I saddled a horse and met Stillwell. He refused to give me the

paper; so I shot him. I was a-helpin' Hoddy, that's all."

The prosecutor leaned closer to Gillis.

"Where is the mortgage, Gillis?"

"Go to hell, will you! That there mortgage ain't recorded, and if it ain't never found, Hoddy don't have to pay it back."

"Where is the hundred dollars he had on him?"

"He never had no money with him. Somebody lied about that. I ort to know—I had the first search of him."

The sheriff and the prosecutor looked at each other. Finally the sheriff turned to Jerky.

"Why did you give yourself up like this, Jerky? We'd never suspected you."

"Didn't you know we would suspect Hoddy Hill?" asked the lawyer.

"How'd I know Hoddy was goin' to foller him to town?" countered Jerky.

"That's true." The prosecutor nodded. "Will you sign a confession?"

"I won't sign a damn thing; it's up to you to convict me."

The lawyer laughed shortly.

"Well, I guess the only thing to do is to put Jerky Gillis in jail and proceed legally to release Hoddy Hill. What caliber is that gun?"

"It's a fo'ty-fo'," said Jerky quickly.

"What did you do with the empty shell after you shot Stillwell?" asked the sheriff.

"Aw, I dunno; I reckon I et it. Want to hear me sing?"

"Jerky, you're drunk."

"All right—you win, Raney. I knowed it would be a long time between drinks; so I brung one with me. Whar-at is m' cell? I crave to git off m' feet."

THE sheriff rode home with Uncle Hoddy. Hashknife and Sleepy were sitting in the shade of the stable when they came in. Smoky went up to the house, and the sheriff rode down to the stable. He dismounted and squatted on his heels with the two cowboys.

"Jerky Gillis confessed to murderin' Stillwell," said the sheriff. "He told a straight story, and the prosecutor turned Hoddy loose."

The sheriff detailed Jerky's confession.

"Do you remember when we came down to git Stillwell's body? Remember me wonderin' where Jerky was all that time?"

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully.

"Well, why don'tcha say somethin', Hashknife?" asked the sheriff.

"What can I say, Raney?"

"I dunno. They'll hang Jerky as sure as hell."

"Jerky knows the penalty, I reckon. Here comes Smoky."

The youngster had tears in his eyes, but he didn't seem ashamed of them.

"Can you imagine it?" he asked, a catch in his voice. "They're all up there, crying over Jerky Gillis."

"Well, why not?" queried Hashknife seriously.

"Don't jump on me," wailed Smoky. "I cried too."

No one spoke for a time. The sheriff was drawing designs in the dirt with the blade of his knife. Then he said:

"Miss Stillwell got a telegram. We brought it out to her."

"From her aunt in Oregon," said Smoky. "She's coming here."

"Goin' to hold the funeral after she gets here?" asked Raney.

Smoky nodded. The sheriff stood up.

"Well, I'm goin' back to town," he said.

"We'll ride with you," said Hashknife. "Did Jerky have a .44?"

"Yeah." The sheriff nodded. "One of them old hawg-legs."

"Shoot like a rifle," muttered Hashknife. "Smoky, you tell the folks we couldn't stay for supper."

They rode back to Rincon and stabled their horses. Jerky's roan had been put up by Speck Magee. Hashknife and Sleepy found Speck at the Double Diamond bar, talking with two of the

Flying V cowboys, whose dirty clothes and streaked faces showed that they had been working. Speck introduced them as Kegley and Hayes.

"You boys been workin' in the dust?" asked Hashknife.

"I'd tell a man!" Kegley laughed. "We've been loadin' a bunch of beef at Washout, and that damned old loadin' corral is knee deep in dust."

"Flyin' V stuff?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah. Sendin' a bunch of graded stuff to St. Louis."

"To Bradley & Jones?"

"I dunno," replied Hayes. "I reckon it's the same outfit we've been sellin' to all along."

"How does it happen you're shippin' from Washout instead of here?"

"It's nearer," replied Kegley. "We do most of our shippin' from Washout. We built the shippin' corrals there a couple years ago."

This gave Hashknife plenty of food for thought, and when Renton and Steve Taylor, his foreman, came to Rincon late that evening, Hashknife asked Renton about it.

"Why, certainly, I'm shipping to Bradley & Jones," he replied briskly. "Sold 'em by wire. That's why they wired you to cancel. We took your cars."

"You kinda slipped one over on us, eh?" The tall cowboy smiled.

"Why not? I've done business a long time with Bradley & Jones, and everything has been satisfactory. It is my opinion that they had an idea that Shorty was pulling some sort of a queer deal down here, and that is why they ordered him back to Seattle."

Hashknife nodded slowly.

"Well, I done the best I could for him."

"You did. Now, I'll buy a drink."

"No use quarrelin' with a winner." Hashknife laughed. "We'll have that drink, Renton."

Later Hashknife went down to see Jerky Gillis, who was sober but unrepentant.

"I ain't sayin' a thing, Hashknife," he said. "I come in here drunk and of my own free will. I ain't sayin' a word about that there mortgage, and I've done said I didn't git any money off Stillwell."

"That's all right, Jerky; but don'tcha know they hang men for murder?"

"You can't scare me a damn bit. As far as I know, I ain't got a relative on earth. There ain't nobody but me worryin' about me bein' in jail. I said I killed Stillwell, but they've got to prove it."

"I think you're an old rawhidin' liar, Jerky," said Hashknife softly.

"Yeah-a-ah? If I was out of here I'd make you eat them words."

"Above all things, I hate a liar."

"Moose! He-e-ey!"

"What do you want?" asked the sheriff.

"Throw this horse faced insulter out of this jail—and keep him out. Either do that or lemme at him."

Hashknife laughed and walked out.

"What do you think of him?" queried the sheriff, after closing the corridor door.

"I think that God made a man when he made Jerky Gillis."

"You think Jerky didn't do it?"

"Whether he did or didn't, my opinion still stands."

HASHKNIFE was a little puzzled by things. It would have been easily possible for Jerky to kill Stillwell; and Jerky was the kind who kills to save a friend. It was possible that Uncle Hoddy had done the shooting, and that Jerky had confessed to a lie to save him.

Hashknife considered all these things as possibilities. But there were things he could not believe. He was also puzzled over the fact that Bradley & Jones had wired him to cancel that shipment, ordered him back to Seattle, and then had gone ahead and purchased by wire from Renton.

If Smoky's letter to Bradley & Jones

had caused them to take their former buyer off that territory, they must certainly know that Renton was guilty of bribing that buyer to handle only Flying V cattle. If so, why did they call off their buyer and do business with the Flying V by wire?

It was possible, but to Hashknife it was inconsistent. Shorty had wired from Tucson that he had confirmed Bradley's wire; so there was nothing further for Hashknife to do. He still had the telegrams from Bradley and the one from Shorty. By this time Shorty would be traveling up the coast, heading for Seattle.

"Anyway, I done what I could for him," said Hashknife, as he and Sleepy sat in the office of the Rincon Hotel.

"You thinkin' out loud?" asked Sleepy, looking up from an old newspaper.

"Yeah." Hashknife smiled. "I was thinkin' about Shorty Woods."

"I hope he don't lose his job."

"Prob'ly won't. They wouldn't ship him back to Seattle to fire him."

"Renton's pretty slick, Hashknife. He must have had it all framed, 'cause they moved our cars right over to Washout. I shore don't think much of that feller Bradley. But mebbe Renton lied to him about how things are here. It's business, I reckon, but it don't smell good."

After that things went along quietly for several days. Hashknife and Sleepy were still riding Tumbling H horses, and Uncle Hoddy begged them to keep the animals as long as they stayed in the Rincon country. They did not tell the old man about the Flying V making that shipment.

"My aunt will arrive this evening," said Marion, as she talked with Hashknife on the front porch. "You'd like her. She's pretty and not so old. Her name is Jane Allen."

"That's fine." Hashknife smiled. "Will she want to take you back with her?"

"I suppose she will. Aunt Jane is a wonderful woman. She has money, but no one ever knew it. She lives simply."

"Never got married, eh?"

"No. But I think she has a sweetheart."

"That would be my luck." Hashknife laughed.

"I know you will like her; every one does."

"That's the way to be—liked by every one. Do you like it out here in Arizona?"

"Under different circumstances, I believe I would love it. Aunt Abbey has been so wonderful to me. My own mother couldn't have been sweeter. And we are all so glad that Uncle Hoddy is out of jail. He couldn't have done a thing like that."

"What do they think of Jerky Gillis?"

"They don't know what to think."

"It is kinda hard to figure out. Did you say your aunt is comin' in tonight?"

"On the seven o'clock train. We are all going to the depot, and I want you to come and meet her."

"I'll try and be there, Miss Stillwell."

Hashknife started down the steps, but stopped.

"Miss Stillwell, does your aunt—I mean, did your aunt know this La Rue person?"

"Oh, yes, she knew him quite well."

"Thank you very much. You got a wire from her, did you?"

"Yes, I did. It was rather funny. Smoky had to go over to Washout and he sent the wire from there. Naturally the wire—that is, the reply came to Washout, instead of Rincon, and a cowboy brought it over from there. It was nice of him to do that."

"It shore was. Was it ever proved that your father didn't get any of that money that was missin'?"

"He never was legally exonerated, Mr. Hartley."

"Thank you, Miss Stillwell."

Hashknife and Sleepy were at the depot that evening when the train arrived. The meeting between Marion

and her aunt was very affectionate. Jane Allen was all that Marion had claimed. She was tall, slender, very handsome in severe black. After she had met the others Marion called Hashknife and Sleepy over.

"Aunt Jane, I want you to meet Hashknife Hartley," she said.

"Hashknife Hartley?" queried Miss Allen quickly.

"Yes, ma'am." The tall cowboy smiled.

"Why, that's funny! Weren't you to meet Shorty Woods at a place called Washout?"

"Shorty Woods?" It was Hashknife's turn to be surprised. "Didja say Shorty Woods, Miss Allen?"

"Why, yes. It was rather a coincidence. I knew he had been sent down in this territory by his firm, but I never expected to see him getting on my train at Tucson, walking on crutches. It seems—"

"Wait a minute!" begged Hashknife. "You say he was to meet me?"

"That was how I recognized your name. He said you were his very best friend and—"

"Is there anything wrong?" asked Smoky.

"Somethin' is all wrong," replied Hashknife.

"Shorty said you wired him," said Miss Allen.

"Is the sheriff around here?" asked the depot agent. "I've got an important telegram for him, and I can't leave."

"I'll take it to him," offered Smoky.

Hashknife and Sleepy backed away and hurried after Smoky, who beat them to the office. The sheriff stepped out as they reached the door.

"A man was shot in Washout a few minutes ago," he said. "Do you want to ride over there with me?"

"What is his name?" asked Hashknife.

"The telegram don't say. Goin' along?"

"Try and stop us!" grunted Hashknife.

They were riding out of Rincon as the people from the Tumbling H were coming down from the depot.

WASHOUT consisted of a depot, watertank, one store and one saloon. The store was also the postoffice. Just away from the depot was a well built loading corral. The three men had covered the five miles in record time, and went straight to the depot, where the anxious agent met them.

He had not touched the body, he said, nor had he told any one. He said he was upstairs, cooking his supper, when the train stopped. He explained that it was seldom that the train dropped a passenger at Washout. He said he came downstairs just in time to see a man going around the corner of the depot.

The train was pulling out and there was considerable noise, but he distinctly heard a shot. Shots were not uncommon in Washout, as celebrating cowboys often blazed away at the moon. But something caused him to go out and look around, and there on the platform he found the man.

"And he was a cripple—walking on crutches," said the agent.

"Gawd, I was afraid you'd say that!" exclaimed Hashknife.

The agent took a lantern and led the way around the dark corner, where he stopped and held up the light.

"He's gone!" exclaimed the agent. "Right here is where he was."

There was no sign of the dead man. Hashknife took the lantern and examined the planking, but there was not even a spot of blood.

"Wasn't you dreamin'?" asked the sheriff.

"I swear I wasn't, Sheriff. I tell you, he was right here, flat on his back."

They took the lantern and looked all around, but nothing was to be found.

"Let's go down to the saloon," suggested Sleepy.

"Might as well look the place all

over," agreed the sheriff.

They found four men playing poker, and in a chair, holding a wet towel to the back of his own head, was Shorty Woods. He grinned at Hashknife and Sleepy, who stopped short in the doorway.

"Well, you showed up all right, I see," said Shorty. "What kind of folks do you have in Arizona country? They shoot me in the legs in Tucson, and up here—look at that, will you?"

Shorty picked up his left crutch and held it out for their inspection. A bullet had smashed the thing about six inches below the shoulder brace.

"For gosh sake, what happened to you, anyway, Shorty?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, I don't know exactly, Hashknife. I got your wire to meet you here; so I got off the train and came humpety-hump around the corner, startin' down toward these lights, when all to once a man was in front of me, and a six-shooter blazed right against me.

"My leg ain't so awful good, you know, and it felt as though somebody yanked my crutch away from me, and down I went. The only thing I can figure out is that I hit the back of my head on one of them warped planks, and it knocked me cold.

"I don't know how long I was knocked out, but I woke up and managed to hobble down here, where the folks swabbed me off and gave me a wet towel. Oh, I'm all right now; the bleedin' has stopped."

"What about the telegram from you to meet you here, Hashknife?" asked the sheriff.

"That's all right," said Hashknife quickly. "I wonder if we can get a horse and saddle for Shorty."

"I'll get one from Turkey Edwards," said the sheriff. "How about it, Turkey? Got a horse and saddle we can rent?"

Edwards, the long, gaunt owner of the store, stopped shuffling the cards long enough to say:

"You cain't rent nothin' from me, Raney—but you can have one free. You know where my stable is; so help yourself. Hope you won't suffer none from that bump, stranger."

"Thank you." Shorty smiled. "I'm all right now, and I'll buy everybody a drink before we pull out."

But before they left Washout, Hashknife went back to the depot to tell the agent they had found the dead man and that he was very much alive. Then he filed a long telegram to Bradley & Jones.

"Can you get that out tonight?" he asked the agent.

"I'll send it right now."

"I'll be over here tomorrow to get the answer, if there is one," said Hashknife.

"That's fine; and I'm glad the man wasn't killed. It sure scared me."

"Scared me, too." Hashknife grinned.

The agent was pounding out the telegram as he walked out to his horse.

Hashknife didn't want to discuss things in front of the sheriff; so there was little said on the way back to Rincon, where they found Smoky Hill waiting for them.

"Miss Allen was so worried about things that I came in to see what happened over at Washout," explained Smoky. "I had to tell her that a man got shot, and she was afraid it was you, Mr. Woods. I'll bet they're all sitting up out there, waiting for me to come back."

"Shorty, why don'tcha ride out there with Smoky," said Hashknife.

"Gosh, I dunno," faltered Shorty. "I look like a mess."

"Oh, you look all right," said Smoky. "I wish you'd come. We've got plenty of room. How did you hurt your head?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see if it would bounce." Shorty laughed.

"Did it?"

"Bounced plumb up among the stars. Hashknife, do you think it would be all right if I went out there?"

"You're halfway out there already," said Hashknife. "Go on out there and talk with your girl."

"Will you come out tomorrow mornin'? Me and you have got to have a talk."

"I'll be out. *Vamose,* both of you—I'm sleepy."

"Well," said Sleepy, when they were back in their room, "what do you think of that deal?"

Hashknife laughed softly.

"I'm sure of one thing, pardner; Shorty Woods wasn't shot by accident in Tucson. That jigger shore bears a charmed life, or somebody around Arizona is a poor shot."

"Ain't there anythin' I can do to help you find him?"

"Do you really want to help me find him, Sleepy?"

"I shore do."

"All right. Tomorrow you start lookin' for a man who shoots a sawed-off .44."

"A sawed-off .44?"

"With a barrel not more than an inch long."

"Huh!" snorted Sleepy foolishly. "It won't be a cowpuncher."

"I'm just wonderin' about that myself."

"And he's a poor shot," mused Sleepy.

"Well, don't ask for any personal tests." Hashknife grinned. "Even a poor shot will hit you if he shoots enough times."

HASHKNIFE was up before daylight. Sleepy had his orders to ride out later to the Tumbling H and wait there, until Hashknife got back from Washout.

"You sure ride early, if you came from Rincon." The agent grinned as he handed Hashknife the telegram.

"The early bird catches the worm," said Hashknife.

"Ain't many worm hunters around here. How's the feller who got his crutch shot?"

"Oh, he's all right."

"It sure had me worried. That one shot—and him layin' there, all stiffened out. I'd have sworn he was dead."

Hashknife read the telegram.

SHORTY WOODS, WASHOUT, ARIZ.
SPECIAL ORDER FILLED BY RENTON RINCON STOP WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN NO ANSWER TO ANY OF OUR TELEGRAMS STOP RENTON WIRES YOU NEVER CAME TO BUY AT RINCON STOP WE WOULD APPRECIATE LETTER IN DETAIL

—BRADLEY

Hashknife put the telegram in his pocket and rode back to Rincon, where he ate breakfast with Speck Magee. Frank Kemp came in to breakfast and sat down with them. Kemp wanted to know about the shooting at Washout, and Hashknife told him what had happened.

"So this was the *real* Shorty Woods, eh?" he said.

Hashknife watched him narrowly as he replied—

"Yeah, the real one, Kemp."

"I understand he's out at the Tumbling H."

"Yeah, he's out there. You'll prob'ly meet him."

The lawyer sipped his coffee thoughtfully.

"Jerky Gillis wants me to defend him," he said.

"He does? What do you think of it, Kemp?"

"I didn't give him any answer. Renton left yesterday for Tucson, and asked me to meet him in Phoenix. He said he'd wire me."

"What's Renton got to do with you defendin' Jerky?"

"Renton pays me a retaining fee—call it a monthly salary, if you wish—to handle his business exclusively. There would be no money in it for me to defend Jerky Gillis, and I'd be a fool to do it against Renton's wishes."

"Yeah, that's true, Kemp; a feller must look out for himself. How soon

will Renton be back here?"

"He didn't say.'"

Hashknife rode out to the Tumbling H alone. He found Sleepy and Smoky perched on the corral fence in a shady spot.

"How's ever'body this mornin'?" asked Hashknife.

"Meet Mister Indigo Blue," said Sleepy, pointing at Smoky.

"Aw, gee!" blurted Smoky defensively. "I'm not blue. Marion's aunt is going to ship the body back to Seattle—"

"Tell him the rest of it," urged Sleepy.

"And Marion is goin' along, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"Tomorrow," said Smoky dolefully. "And they aren't coming back. Miss Allen and Shorty are going to get married as soon as everything is settled, and she has money enough to put them in business. She says cattle buying is too dangerous."

"Yeah, when they start shootin' cripples, it's dangerous. Smoky, will you go up to the house and tell Miss Allen that I'd like to have her come out on the front porch where I can talk privately to her?"

"You bet I will, Hashknife," replied Smoky, and hurried up to the house.

"What have you got to talk privately about?" asked Sleepy.

"I want to warn her about some of Shorty's bad points," Hashknife said seriously.

Jane Allen was perfectly willing to talk with Hashknife, and Smoky came back to sit on the fence with Sleepy.

"That's my idea of a mighty pretty woman," said Sleepy.

"She is wonderful," agreed Smoky. "You should find a woman like her, Sleepy."

"Find 'em and lose 'em," sighed the stocky cowpuncher.

"You've never had any luck with women?"

"Luck? I dunno, Smoky; you see, I've never been married."

"Neither have I," said Smoky, smiling wistfully.

"You? Hell, you ain't dry behind the ears yet." Sleepy laughed. "You'll have lots of girls, feller. Look 'em over careful before you pick one for life." And Sleepy sang softly—

> "Could you be true
> To eyes of blue
> If you looked into eyes of gray?"

"I could," said Smoky.

"You've got the makin' of a good cowpuncher, Smoky."

"Do you think I have?"

"Sure have; you can lie like one already. I wonder if that lanky pardner of mine is goin' to talk all day to that pretty woman."

"What is his right name, Sleepy?"

"His name is Hennery," said Sleepy. "But don't call him that."

"You haven't always been Sleepy, have you?"

"No-o-o, I jist got thataway from bein' up late at night. Well, I reckon the private conference is about over up there. Yeah, the tall feller is shakin' her hand. They must have agreed on somethin'."

Hashknife strolled down to the corral, a satisfied expression on his long, lean face.

"How do you like Miss Allen?" asked Smoky.

"She's got a lot of horse sense."

"And plenty good looks," added Sleepy.

"I didn't notice that."

"You see, Smoky!" exclaimed Sleepy. "When you can wear high heels on your boots, a chin strap on your hat, pack an old Colt on your hip and lie like that, you'll be a tophand cowpuncher."

"I guess there is hope for me." Smoky laughed.

"Plenty." Hashknife smiled. "Son, Miss Allen will ask you to do somethin' for her, and you do it. Don't ask any questions and don't tell anybody."

"All right, Hashknife; anything she says."

THAT afternoon all the people came in from the Tumbling H, and while Aunt Abbey and Uncle Hoddy visited Jerky Gillis, Miss Allen made all the arrangements to ship her brother's body to Seattle on the evening train. She bought tickets for Marion, Shorty Woods and herself, which was big business for the Rincon depot agent.

Steve Taylor, Renton's foreman, was in town, and Hashknife asked him if he knew how to get in touch with Renton.

"He's in Tucson now," replied Steve. "Ought to be back pretty soon. He said he'd be at the Ranger Hotel if we wanted him, and for us to wire him there."

"You don't know where Kemp is, do you, Taylor?"

"He's out at the ranch, drunk as a fool. Every time he slops over, he comes out there. Says it ain't dignified to get drunk in town."

"When did he come out there—this mornin'?"

"No, he came out last night about eight o'clock."

Hashknife met Uncle Hoddy on the street and told him that Renton was at the Ranger Hotel in Tucson.

"Will you write that telegram you spoke about, Hashknife? I don't know jist how to word it."

They went into the Rincon Hotel and Hashknife wrote:

IN ORDER TO SATISFY MORTGAGE I MUST SELL TUMBLING H AT ONCE AND WILL GIVE YOU FIRST CHANCE STOP SEE ME AT ONCE.

—HODDY HILL

"That's about it," said Hashknife. "Send it as quick as you can."

"I'll go right to the depot," said Uncle Hoddy. Hashknife smiled as he watched the old man bowlegging his way up the street.

"There's one nice thing about the old-timers—they don't ask questions," said Hashknife.

"It wouldn't do 'em a bit of good to ask you things," replied Sleepy. "You won't even tell me what you've got on your mind. I just foller you around like Mary's little lamb."

"You're a great pardner, Sleepy."

"Yeah—silent pardner."

They were all at the depot that night to see the party leave for Seattle. That is, they were all there except Smoky, and no one even inquired for him.

Hashknife and Sleepy spent the next day in loafing around the town. Speck Magee and Sleepy played pool until both of them were tired out from walking around the table. Kemp, slightly bleary, came in from the Flying V. He was sober, but not in a pleasant frame of mind.

"Hoddy Hill sent Renton a wire yesterday," said Hashknife.

"What for?" asked Kemp.

"Well, Hoddy feels that he's got to sell the Tumblin' H. Even if that mortgage is missin' and never was recorded, Hoddy feels that it is a moral obligation. So he's offerin' Renton the first chance to buy him out."

"Renton wants it," said Kemp. "That is, he did want it. He may have changed his mind by this time."

"Have you heard from him?"

"Not a word."

CHAPTER VII

HASHKNIFE SHOWS HIS HAND

SAM FISHER, depot agent at Rincon, was a grouchy individual. Being a depot agent in a small town meant that he must be capable of acting as telegraph operator, express clerk, baggage and freight clerk. In fact, he did all there was to do, and wailed over the small salary received.

Sam usually closed his office at nine o'clock in the evening, went around to see that all doors were locked from the inside, kicked out the office cat and then went upstairs to his one-room apartment, where he would stick his long nose into a paperback novel.

This night Sam followed his regular routine. He remembered that the big sliding door of the baggage room was open; so he took a lantern, went through the connecting door to his office, and was crossing the floor to the big doorway when a man arose from behind a packing case and shoved a gun into Sam's ribs.

"Close the door," ordered the man. "And if you let out one yip, Saint Peter will hear it."

Sam closed the door and looked for the next order.

"Set down on the floor against that box and rest your feet."

Sam was not exactly timid, but he was cautious. The man wore a black mask, which covered his head and neck, and Sam noticed that the muzzle of the big Colt did not waver at all.

"I ain't got a cent," declared Sam.

"You ain't tryin' to borrow any from me, are you?" asked the man.

"No," said Sam, "I ain't. You ain't goin' to stick up a train, are you?"

"That's an idea." The masked man chuckled. "I never thought of that."

Fifteen minutes passed, and Sam began to get nervous.

"How long are you goin' to keep me here?" asked Sam.

"Gettin' paid for it, ain't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"The railroad pays you a salary, don't they? Keep your mouth shut about this, and they'll never know you was off the job."

"Oh—" said Sam.

It was fully thirty minutes from the time Sam was made captive before the masked man made any move. From somewhere came a soft whistle. The man motioned Sam to his feet.

"Open that door, and after I'm out, lock it. One crooked move and I'll drill you full of holes—understand?"

"Yu-yes, sir," stammered Sam.

Sam did not see the man who had whistled the signal. In fact, Sam did not look around much. He went back to his office, lighted the lamp and searched the place. The little safe, which only held a few dollars, was intact, the ticket drawer untouched. Apparently not a thing had been taken.

The masked man had not warned him to keep all this a secret; so after a careful examination he went down to the sheriff's office, where he found the sheriff and Hashknife. Just a bit out of breath, he told his story to them.

"You ain't been drinkin' nor dreamin', have you, Sam?" asked the sheriff.

Sam denied this indignantly.

They went to the depot with Sam, who took them to the baggage room and explained what had happened.

"Sounds crazy to me," declared the sheriff. "There wouldn't be any sense in it, Sam. Nothin' gone, nothin' touched."

After looking around the place, Hashknife and the sheriff went back to the office.

"The railroad company better send a man out to replace Sam," said the sheriff. "That jigger is goin' crazy."

"Yeah, I'll bet he is," agreed Hashknife.

That night, long after Sleepy was in bed and snoring, Hashknife sat at the window of his room, watching the deserted street. At midnight a passenger train stopped at the depot, and a few minutes later a solitary figure came down the street. Hashknife watched the man walk into the Double Eagle Saloon, then he went over to the bed and began undressing. Sleepy blinked up at him.

"Bob Renton jist got back from Tucson," said Hashknife.

"What am I supposed to do—give three cheers?" asked Sleepy drowsily.

Hashknife laughed softly and pulled off his boots.

AT ten o'clock the next morning Bob Renton rode into Rincon. He found Frank Kemp at his office, and after a short conversation they went to the livery stable, where Kemp rented a saddle-

horse. Sleepy was watching them from the Double Eagle Saloon, and as soon as they rode out of town he went to the hitch-rack, where he untied his horse and an extra one. Then he rode toward the depot.

Uncle Hoddy Hill was sitting in an easy chair on his porch when Renton and his lawyer arrived. Kemp shook hands with the old man, but Renton merely nodded and said:

"I got your telegram, Hill. You say you've got to sell this ranch to satisfy that mortgage. All right, what's your price?"

"I've been tryin' to figure that out," replied Uncle Hoddy. "It's worth more than it was when you wanted to buy it, because there's more cattle. You see, I haven't been able to sell any. Let's go inside and talk this over."

Kemp and Uncle Hoddy sat down, but Renton moved restlessly about.

"I won't pay more than I offered you," said Renton. "I don't want the place as much as I did."

"That's up to you, Renton," replied Uncle Hoddy. "I'm givin' you first chance."

"Why wouldn't this be a good scheme?" suggested the lawyer. "If you can figure out a price on the ranch itself, we can round up the cattle and make a count."

"Do you think I'm goin' to pay a market price?" asked Renton. "If I can't take this place at a bargain, I won't touch it. And I'll bet he'll have a hell of a time getting a better price. Let him show what his income has been for the past two years." Renton laughed harshly. "Let him show anybody what this place pays."

"I can easily show *why* it didn't pay, Renton."

"Oh, can you? Well, go ahead. You know what sort of terms I'll do business on. Kemp knows. Go ahead and name a price. I've got you where the hair is short, Hill. I've often said I'd make you sell out at my price."

Renton walked across the room and looked through the window. He could see the road to Rincon. Two riders were coming toward the house. Renton scowled, looked closer. It was Sleepy and Sam Fisher, the depot agent. Renton turned quickly and started for the open door, but stopped short.

Just inside the doorway stood Hashknife Hartley, his level gray eyes fixed on Renton. Then Hashknife spoke sharply—

"Which one is it, Shorty?"

"You've got him in front of you!" snapped Shorty's voice, and Renton swung around to see Shorty Woods leaning against the doorway to the dining room, braced against one crutch.

"Hello, La Rue," he said. "Long time I no see you, feller."

Renton's face had gone white, eyes narrowed, his mouth merely a line.

"They didn't go far night before last, Renton," said Hashknife. "They bought tickets to Seattle, but got off at Washout. Just a little trick o' mine, Renton, to see if you wouldn't show yourself after they left. It was easy to figure you was keepin' out o' sight o' Shorty and Jane Allen, La Rue. Take his gun, Hoddy. He's a lobo, but he's trapped now."

Hoddy got the gun and walked back to the table.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Kemp, as Hashknife stepped over and searched him quickly for concealed weapons.

"No guns, eh?" Hashknife grinned.

"Why would I carry a gun?"

For a moment all eyes were off Renton, and quick as a flash he drew a short gun from under his left armpit.

"Trapped, am I?" he cried. "Make a move, any of you. Back away from that door, Hartley! I'll kill anybody who makes a move. Drop that gun of mine on the floor, Hill."

Hoddy tossed him the gun, and he cautiously picked it up.

"Throw your gun through the doorway, Hartley," he ordered.

Hashknife tossed the gun out on the

porch.

"I'm going out and get on my horse," said Renton evenly, "and I'll kill the man who tries to stop me."

He stepped slowly over to the doorway, backed out, keeping his gun covering the group in the house; and backed right into the arms of Sleepy. Renton had apparently forgotten the short cowboy was out there.

Renton fought like a tiger, but Sleepy knew how to handle him, and when he pitched him back into the room, all the fight was out of him. Hashknife recovered the short gun and held it out to the sheriff.

"This is the gun that killed Stillwell," he said.

"Do you reckon it's safe for the folks to come in?" asked Uncle Hoddy. "I know they're mighty nervous out there in that bedroom."

RENTON sat on the floor, nursing a wrenched arm. Jane Allen looked at him and nodded quickly.

"Why, of course, it is Albert La Rue," she said.

"Anythin' you'd like to say, La Rue?" asked Hashknife.

"You can't prove anything against me," the man declared. "Mark Stillwell served his time for that job; you can't convict me of anything. If I want to change my name, that's my business."

"I was kinda stuck for awhile," admitted Hashknife. "The man who killed Mark Stillwell shot a short gun. The bullet don't show any marks of lands in the bore, and it didn't penetrate like it should. Renton wore a belt gun, and I never thought about him wearin' another. In fact, I almost suspected Mr. Kemp."

"Go ahead and see how much a jury will think of your ideas," gritted Renton.

"Never mind the jury," said Hashknife, "although maybe a jury would be interested in those shots you took at Shorty —and in a few other things." Hashknife then turned to Sleepy and said, "Bring Sam Fisher in."

Sam Fisher came in, frightened badly.

"There's your pardner, Sam," said Hashknife. "Do you want to go to jail with him?"

"What in the world did Sam have to do with it?" asked Kemp.

"Sam was the boy who held up and faked telegrams for Mr. La Rue. Remember the holdup at the depot last night? Well, me and Sleepy pulled that job. While Sleepy entertained Sammy, I searched the flimsy book. In case you don't know what that is, it's the book in which they record telegrams. It helps the auditor check up things. And those telegrams wasn't recorded. When I sent a wire, Sammy held it for Renton, and Renton told him what the answer was to be."

"How in the world did you ever think of that?" asked Shorty.

"Oh, I used a little bait, Shorty. La Rue, do you remember the wire I sent to Jack Kinnear at St. Louis? And do you remember the reply from Jack Kinnear? Do you? Fine. I don't mind tellin' you that Kinnear's name is Oscar and that his packin' house is in Kansas City—not St. Louis. Even a lobo wolf can be caught, if you offer the right bait."

La Rue said nothing. Hashknife turned to Sam Fisher.

"Am I right, Sam?"

"You are," said Sam huskily. "I'll tell all I know."

"That's fine, Sam. Where was La Rue when he was supposed to be in Tucson?"

"Living upstairs over the depot with me."

"And you gave him Hoddy Hill's telegram?"

"Yes." Sam nodded miserably.

"Where's that mortgage, La Rue?"

"I burned it, damn you!"

"And that—" Hashknife smiled—"is an admission of murder."

Quickly the sheriff handcuffed both La Rue and Sam Fisher. Kemp leaned against the wall, grave of face. Finally he looked at Hashknife and smiled.

"It looks as though I wouldn't get a chance to defend Jerky."

"You might try your hand on La Rue."

"No, I don't think he will require much legal advice. You know, I told him that the sheriff said you were the cleverest detective in the Western ranges, and he thought Raney was covering too much territory."

"He ain't a detective—he's a trapper." Sleepy laughed.

"Here's a job for you, Kemp," said Hashknife. "See if you can't get the law to give La Rue's holdings to Marion. She's shore entitled to all he's got, if anybody is."

"I'll ask her about that right now, Hartley."

Hashknife and Sleepy went out where the sheriff, deputy and Smoky were putting La Rue and Sam Fisher on their horses.

"Want to go back with us and see Jerky walk out?" asked Speck.

"Shore." Hashknife smiled, and Sleepy went to get the horses.

Marion came out and took Hashknife by the sleeve.

"I'm not going back to Seattle," she said.

"You ain't? Well, that's fine Marion."

"And that mortgage will never be collected. Mr. Kemp says he's sure the court will give me the Flying V."

"I'm glad," said Hashknife. "It'll make everybody happy."

"And if I get it, I'll make you foreman over it all, Hashknife Hartley."

Hashknife grinned.

"That's shore nice of you. We're goin' in to turn Jerky loose."

"Oh, that's wonderful! I must tell the folks."

As she ran into the house, Sleepy came with the horses, and the two cowpunchers galloped away down the road ahead of the sheriff and his party.

No one in Rincon seemed to know where they went. The horses were stabled in town, their bill paid at the hotel. And while folks made a search of the settlement, far down the track puffed a freight train, heading away from Rincon. On the rear platform of the caboose squatted two brakemen, smoking.

"Where are our passengers goin', Bill?" asked one of them.

"Oh, them two? I dunno. Look to me like a couple cowboys that was runnin' away from their horses. I asked the tall one where they was goin', and he says, 'Only the good Lord knows, brother, but it'll be over a strange hill.' "

"Been eatin' loco weed, eh?"

"Sounds like it."

TIBETAN TURQUOISE

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

A Story of Chinatown

GEORGE KINGSLEY leaned contentedly over the rail of the docking *Taiyo Maru.* It was probable that some one from the San Francisco offices of the Asiatic-Import would be there to greet him. Any fellow absent from the States for six long years on his first service for the A-I deserved to be met, even if he hadn't been bringing back the priceless L'asa necklace of ancient turquoise.

Up in the lonely Kang-si-ro hills Kingsley had thought many times of the return to the States. He had also conjured up the pleasant vision of home in noisy Kashgar, in windswept Tsitsihar, within the walls of L'asa itself; Kingsley had been in the far places. Now he wanted to forget the Orient. No more sandstorms, deadly cold, and deadlier brigands. Ease was what he wanted. Laughter and comfort, among white people who would be too polite to ask him about the jagged wound on his

tanned cheek, where a knife had ripped him as he ducked under a blow aimed at his heart.

The man, of course, was dead. Otherwise, Kingsley would have been forty feet under snow in a deserted Tibetan mountain pass; and the turquoise necklace would have been stolen from his money belt.

Shipboard hadn't been home, even if his companions were Caucasians; there was the constant presence of Orientals. Kingsley was able to guess something of the character of the steerage passengers from seeing them take their hour of air each day. The tall, black clad Chinese; how many Americans aboard realized, as Kingsley did, that the man was a *bo' how doy,* a hatchetman, a 'binder, imported by some vengeful tong to start on a career of murder? Who other than the lean A-I man recognized the snarled word *"dzün!"* uttered by another Asiatic, and knew it to mean "liar" in border Tibetan?

For all Kingsley had bought the turquoise necklace in a lamasary, and paid for it, the presence of a Tibetan speaking native on the *Taiyo Maru* had been disturbing, and he was glad the voyage had ended without incident. This rather proved to him that the attack in Shanghai, after the Asiatic-Import had displayed the turquoise necklace to experts, was just a casual attempt at robbery, with murder involved only because he had resisted.

All of this was over now. Passengers were leaving the ship. Kingsley himself walked along the deck, eyes alert to see if he could recognize and remember any of the local A-I men. This, in the press of people on the pier, was impossible. Kingsley's head lifted, and he gazed over the roof of the dock at the skyline. Rectangles mostly, a square here, a spire or dome there. High on a hill he did catch a glimpse of a tiled roof glittering in the sun. Chinatown. Synthetic. Occupied by fat merchants, whose sons attended the university where Kingsley, six years ago, had been an assistant in Oriental languages. He had joined the A-I, unable to stand an academic existence; he wondered if he had changed much in six years.

Some one was calling up to him politely:

"Mr. Kingsley! Coming ashore?"

George waved his hand.

He went down the gangplank swiftly with long, smooth strides; an older man, equally tall, met him at the end. The polite tone was in the other's voice as he shook Kingsley's hand.

"Very glad you're back, Mr. Kingsley," the man said. "Have a good trip across?"

Kingsley didn't recognize the man, but he said naturally:

"Lousy. Couldn't wait to get home."

"Of course," the other man said soothingly. He glanced appraisingly at Kingsley, and said in the same voice, "The valuable part of the A-I shipment is in the *Taiyo's* tank. We'll see it cleared, and then you'll want to get home."

Kingsley thought of the room which had been his at the university; he said levelly:

"Home? I'll want a drink."

The other man began to chuckle. Suddenly, explosively, he laughed.

"You don't remember me? I'm Carstairs. We wondered what you'd be like when you returned."

Kingsley grinned.

"Was I that bad?"

"You were pretty distant," Carstairs suggested diplomatically. He slipped his arm through Kingsley's. "Let's get our stuff passed through customs. The tank's open. Gold. Minted yen for the Sumiyama Bank, being sent to the mint in an armored truck. That's the way the insurance people'll deliver our cases today. If your necklace comes up to expectations, it's a museum piece. Er—mind tell me how—"

"How I got it? Easy. The head lama at Ning-K'iang-tse thought he was dying, and I gave him a dose of oil. Told me to name my reward, so I sug-

gested the turquoises around his neck as a keepsake. I'd never seen any that color. Some of the yellow-caps didn't like it, but the old boy came through."

"Newspapers printed the story," Carstairs said. "Cables out of Shanghai. Next morning we had an offer for the necklace. Two thousand. From a big, oily Chinese named Bin T'an Ho. Naturally we declined. Next day he offered three; the third day, five thousand. Then, suddenly, the offers stopped. He said his clients were no longer interested. Funny, eh?"

"*Su she kyi du'?*" George Kingsley said. "Who knows?"

"Nobody. We'll be careful until it's in the safe. Heard you were jumped in Shanghai. Because of the turquoise necklace?"

"I don't think so."

KINGSLEY was introduced to the customs officials in a room with barred windows. The door was bolted behind them. A representative of the insurance company, named Winters, together with two big guards from the armored truck, and a special policeman, stood about the room. On the bare floor were the two heavily insured boxes marked for the Asiatic-Import, already removed under guard from the ship's tank. Without waste of time one of the customs men went to work on the first of the boxes.

The seals, laid over indented places where the wood was joined together, on all four sides, were broken. The iron strapping was pulled away and the dovetailed end of the box carefully taken out. Nails screamed as they were dragged from the wood. Another appraiser was at work on the second crate, which, unlike the first, was marked fragile.

From the first box, when the cotton wadding was pulled off, came a pair of rugs. Jorgensen, the chief appraiser for Oriental goods, picked one up, handling it with expert fingers. He said:

"Kashgar rug, Mr. Kingsley?"

"It might be a Yarkand," said George. "I bought it in Kashgar, and it has the fretted ground with bats and butterflies and circles, but look at the four dragons. It could be a Yarkand."

"You're right," Jorgensen admitted. "It's the finest I ever saw."

He jotted down figures on his sheet and, assisted by another official, continued with his examination.

Out of the case came Tibetan jewelry, silver and turquoise, some of it repacked in Shanghai, others in the original bits of strangely embroidered silk, worn and faded. There were boxes of Chinese gold, inlaid with jade; headdresses of gold and pearls from the far provinces; strange jeweled sword hilts and blades with the temper line of waves or of undulating sand dunes. Here was the result of Kingsley's last two-year journey to Tibet and beyond.

Even Carstairs' practised eye was bright.

"It's the finest lot I ever saw," he whispered to Kingsley. "We'll pay a pretty penny in duty—and get it back when the stuff goes on sale." He added, "The turquoise necklace must be in the other case."

Inside the second container, surrounded by packages of old silks and Tibetan altar rugs, was another strapped, sealed box, two feet long, eighteen inches high and a foot in width; it was marked with many Chinese characters.

The customs man bending over it smiled.

"There'll be a high time in Chinatown when this is opened," he said. "Finest Tiger *ng-ki-po*. Guaranteed to raise hair on the dead. Did you get this, too, Mr. Kingsley?"

"It was added to fill up the shipment." Carstairs laughed. "What do you do with it? Shoot it out to the Treasury warehouse?"

The man nodded.

"Bonded liquor," he agreed. "Some tong'll buy it, when a member marries off a daughter."

The packets were unwrapped, the

contents displayed and appraised. Colors made the bare room beautiful; crimsons and golds and brilliant, fiery yellows; greens and blacks; ultramarine and carmine. Every color save the curious blue-green of the finest Tibetan turquoise.

It was Carstairs who said quietly—

"Where's the necklace?"

"Our agent saw it packed in Shanghai," Winters, the insurance man, broke in. "It's probably inside of something."

"The cases are empty," Jorgensen objected.

"The Chinese liquor case isn't."

"It couldn't be there," Carstairs said. "The *ng-ki-po* we turn over to Uncle Sam until we're allowed to dispose of it according to law. Anyhow, the necklace isn't in the liquor crate."

"Unless," some one said, "the Asiatic-Import didn't care about payin' duty—"

Jorgensen snapped at the man who had spoken—

"The A-I doesn't work that way."

"Well," Winters asked, "where's the necklace?"

The customs men looked again, but found no sign of the rare blue-green gems.

"The necklace was packed in Shanghai," Kingsley said soberly. "I was in the godown at the time, watching the stuff. Warren, the English consulate chap, wanted a look-see at it. It couldn't have been stolen in the packing room. All packing coolies are searched before leaving, you know. We did find something. Opium—not much—on one of the boys. Heaven knows where he stole it—but not from us.

"Now, the necklace's gone. Where?"

Winters was disturbed, and began to show it.

"Necklaces have been smuggled before," he said nasally. "Some one in this room might have picked it out of the case and be hiding it to avoid the duty—"

"Search away," Kingsley told him.

"George," said Carstairs, "kindly shut up. Nobody's going to be searched. That right, Jorgensen? Let's consider this soberly. First, the necklace, according to Kingsley, the insurance company, and our own record of shipment, was put in the case at Shanghai. Thirdly, it isn't in the case now. Which leaves only secondly: That it was stolen on shipboard, and everybody knows a ship's tank can't be opened, and nothing's ever been taken from one. And, anyhow—" grimly— "the seals are intact. I see only one possibility. Let's look in the case of liquor."

Jorgensen agreed.

"The case ought to go unopened to the Treasury Department," he said, "but, if you'll pardon the pun, this is an unusual case. It would be a good way to smuggle, wouldn't it? Case goes to the warehouse, is claimed, opened, and the jewels secured. If it weren't an A-I shipment, I'd have opened the case anyhow. Let's do it, eh?"

Inside the case were found twelve brown earthenware bottles of *ng-ki-po*, stoppered and sealed, each packed between gray cotton wadding. Twelve bottles. Nothing more.

"Open each bottle," Winters demanded. "The necklace may be inside."

Jorgensen laughed shortly, without humor.

"Too bad if it is," he said. "Because, gentlemen, the Tibetan turquoise breaks down in alcohol. I wouldn't give a dollar Mex for what we'd find, if we found anything. Most other gems are preserved by alcohol, but not old turquoise."

"We wouldn't be compelled to pay the loss," Winters muttered. "The contents have got to be analyzed."

"Not here. Some one higher up the ladder must give permission. I'll promise, Mr. Winters, that the liquor goes straight to the Treasury people."

The insurance man picked up bottle after bottle, hoping against hope, despite Jorgensen's statement, to hear the telltale click of jewels against the opaque brown sides of the earthenware. Finally, he set down the twelfth bottle.

"It's over my head," he admitted sadly. "We guaranteed to deliver the shipment, including the necklace, safely in San Francisco. If it was destroyed en route, not through fault of the A-I, we're stuck just the same." He asked uncertainly, "Gentlemen, do any of you really think the necklace was put inside one of the bottles?"

"The seals on top," Kingsley said, "are old. Ten years old. Or more. That's the way it looks. See how brittle the wax is? Fresh wax can be removed without tampering; old wax can't. And, Mr. Winters, how could a man unseal, uncork, a bottle in a busy packing room?"

"Well—"

"Will you join us in a drink?" George asked. "My first ashore."

"I need one too," said Winters.

OUTSIDE the appraisers' offices the examination of passengers was going on; Winters said to Carstairs:

"Jorgensen tells me there's supposed to be opium aboard. Heaven help any woman with a false bottom to her trunk, with silk in it. Did you hear anything about it, coming across, Kingsley?"

George shook his head.

"I wouldn't doubt it," he said. "Rotten looking lot of Chinese. I—damn it, I wish we had the necklace! Who was it, again, that wanted to buy it, Carstairs?"

"Bin T'an Ho. Chinese tough boy. Mixed up in the Four Families tong, which is a bad one. Caught wholesaling drugs once. Plenty of killings to their credit. They have the meanest lot of 'binders in Chinatown. Kill for fun. Er—care to meet the gentleman, George?"

"I might. You could introduce me as a nice, innocent young chap just joining the A-I."

"Hmm." Carstairs looked squarely at Kingsley's lean, tanned face, at his wind narrowed eyes. "You look innocent as hell, George."

"I am." Kingsley grinned. "Like hell. Maybe we can think of something else."

"If the necklace is recovered," Winters promised, "there'll be a generous reward, Kingsley."

George stared at him, and then laughed.

"I want it because it's ours," he said. "Because it hung around the necks of a thousand Tibetan priest-rulers. Because it's a gorgeous thing, and came straight from the hand of the thunder god to the yellow robed lamas."

"Hmm," Carstairs said again. "Is that a fact? Thunder!"

Kingsley was smiling.

"I wondered if there were any connection." He grinned.

"The tong symbol of the Four Families," Carstairs said softly, "is the ascending dragon, holding a thunderbolt."

"That's what I thought," George Kingsley told him. "And, from what I've heard about the Four Families tong, it's recruited from the western Chinese border—nearest Tibet.

"Once they tried to kill my boy because he wouldn't let 'em put poison in my chow. They have other ways of killing, too. I know a little about 'em. I was in one of their villages. It looks like I didn't come home to rest, old man."

Carstairs voiced the slogan of the A-I field men:

"You found it in the first place, George; it's up to you to deliver it to us. Good hunting!"

"In the meantime," George asked solemnly, "how about that drink?"

THE early morning sun was just beginning to gleam on the curved, bright tiled roofs of Chinatown when Kingsley and Carstairs stepped off the cable car. The great bazaars had not yet been opened for the day's tourist trade, although deeper in the Oriental district the wooden shutters were already down, to permit Chinese matrons to make

their purchases before white men were abroad. Up on a roof the rising of the sun brought out an aged *j'ou-yenli'o-kong* to his daily labors—a blind old man who sat all day in the blazing light grinding colors he would never see. Across the street was the old cathedral of red brick; its bell began to beat seven brazen strokes. Waiter coolies in a procession ran from an eating place, carrying trays of food balanced on their heads.

"I had eggs and bacon," Kingsley said. "And grapefruit. And coffee with cream. I feel like the Dalai Lama himself."

"You bathe oftener," Carstairs told him. "See that lily vender? He's a tong spy. I don't know which one. Lost his right hand, and that ended his usefulness as a 'binder. Now, let's get this straight. We go to see Bin T'an Ho. We come out with the truth; the necklace is gone, or we'd sell it to him for five thousand. He knows it's priceless, and the value depends on how much a person wants it. That's the weak link. Then we ask him if he'll buy the turquoise at five thousand, gold, provided we find it. That it?"

"Right. We've figured out that he decided he didn't want it just about the time the crates were packed and put in the *Taiyo's* tank. Which means one of three things: The necklace was stolen in Shanghai, under our noses; or on the *Taiyo;* or it's here in San Francisco."

"Perhaps it just vanished, the way the opium did. The Treasury Department boys thought they had a straight tip. Only it's like looking for needles in haystacks. A steamer's pretty large." Carstairs began to chuckle. "Good thing Winters wasn't on the trail of the dope. He'd be looking inside of bottles."

"I had a shake at one of 'em myself," Kingsley said. "Liquid inside. Anyhow, a container of that size, full of opium, would have been heavier, I suppose."

"We might ask Bin T'an Ho about it, too," said Carstairs. "He'll be glad to tell us—in a pig's eye."

Kingsley shrugged.

"All we can do is to have a try at him, and see where we get. Er—that lily vender chap. He's padding along behind us. Got a glimpse of him in a window."

The other A-I man played up instantly. He began to talk about nothing at all in a loud voice.

While the two men strode down the street, headed for Waverly Place and the rooms of the Four Families tong, of which Bin T'an Ho was an official, Kingsley's feeling was one of strangeness.

In shop windows (of Illinois glass) were dried tentacles of yellowish squid, black, boned duck legs, sea urchins with pale beards, translucent shrimp, dragon's eye fruit. Chinese swore in fluent, hissing Cantonese as they unloaded not Peking carts but Detroit trucks. Through a side street, the house windows still barred and overpainted as in the days when women, black, brown, yellow, white, and all the shades between, waited for customers, the lean A-I field man could see the gray bulk of the Hall of Justice—so near, and yet so far in understanding from the Oriental district.

Snails floated soft-side upward in tubs of grimy water, to attract the eye of the hungry. Pigtail sausage, slabs of pink and white pork, mutton entrails, surrounded bowls of China lilies; the familiar odor wrinkled Kingsley's nose. He half closed his eyes, but could not imagine he was on the far side of the Pacific; there was the ever present acrid smell of engine exhausts.

In one shop an adding machine clicked, the total checked by an ancient Chinese with an abacus; in another round eyed merchants recited the Twenty-four Patterns of Filial Piety to their grandfather. A flower girl, eyes heavy from lack of sleep, sidled out of a taxi and disappeared in a dark doorway. A husband, high in a frame building, berated his wife—"May the bones of your

ancestors be washed into the sea!" And Chinatown paused to listen.

KINGSLEY missed nothing. For six years he had listened to and spoken nothing but Chinese or Tibetan, and yet he did not in any sense feel at home. It was different, strange, this Chinatown.

"We go top-side," Carstairs said at last. "See those two boys smoking cigarets across the way? Watchers for the Four Families. No. 2 'binders. Fellows who've killed less than five men."

"They're not as tough as they look," Kingsley protested. "In China—"

"This," the other grunted, "isn't China, George. They've learned a lot from us. They'll attack head on, if the odds are in their favor. D'you know how many killings there've been here? Down at the Chinatown squad's room you can see a whole bookful of faces, all killers. Some of 'em were caught. The rest—"

Carstairs waved an eloquent hand.

"Look here—" Kingsley grinned—"are you trying to upset my digestion? Because you can't do it!"

"I'm only saying that I've got a wife and youngsters, and I think we're apt to get into trouble."

George Kingsley said gently:

"I'll be careful. You do the first talking. Bin T'an Ho'll know I understand a little Chinese. I hope he doesn't guess how much I really do— Well, pull the rope, old man."

A tinny bell jingled; a panel was drawn back, and a voice in shrill Cantonese demanded to know who was wanted, and why.

Carstairs said—

"Go tell Mr. Bin Ho we like see him."

"Allo tlime mebbe-so he sleep," said the Four Families guard. "You wantchee I go see?"

"Tell him Asiatic-Import like see him."

When the panel was crashed ungently shut, the A-I office man growled:

"And he understands just as much English as I do, George. They always make believe they must talk pidgin. For all I know, that chap has a college degree."

This time the door was slowly swung out for them—a heavy steel door—and the two men were in a black hall. Led by the door guard, they passed over bare boards to a room over the street, a room with silken hangings across the windows and with banners on the wall. In one corner were arm—old swords, pikes without hafts, arrows arranged in a circle. There were high teak stools, and a table on which was a *hi'o-ho'ang-y'ou* vase of pale, soft yellow. A portly Chinese waddled into the room just as the white men entered.

"Good morning," said Bin T'an Ho. As he bowed he said something beneath his breath; Kingsley caught a word or two of it, enough to recognize the border dialect, and to believe that the whole had been, "May boiling oil be poured over your naked bodies."

"Hello, Mr. Ho," said Carstairs. "I want you to meet one of our men, Mr. Kingsley." Kingsley could sense the faint derision in Carstairs' voice as he added, "He been long time in China, know plenty Chinee talk."

"How do you do, Mr. Kingsley?" asked Bin T'an Ho.

"Ni kam yat, ho la," said George Kingsley, much as a child might boast of understanding a strange language.

"I am very well." Bin T'an Ho smiled agreeably. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"We very sorry necklace gone," said Carstairs. "We find him, you give us ten thousand Mex? Five thousand gold?"

"Have you found the necklace?"

Kingsley was holding out cigarets; Bin T'an Ho waved them aside, explaining that he had only just finished his three morning pipes. Kingsley was more than ever alert. Till this visit nothing had been said about the turquoise ornament having been missed, but Bin T'an Ho was not surprised.

"It's gone," said Carstairs dismally.

"That is very unfortunate," Bin T'an Ho remarked politely. "And you hope to recover it?"

"*I* think it was stolen in Shanghai," Carstairs said, "but Kingsley thinks it was taken on the ship, and maybe it is in Chinatown now."

"How sad," said the tong man. He spread out his plump hands. "And you, my friends, have come to enlist my aid in finding it?"

"That's it," Kingsley agreed gravely. "Mr. Carstairs told me you were a good friend of the company, and had many dealings with them in the past. I said maybe you might help us, especially if we gave you a discount on some of our goods sometime."

"I have heard nothing of the necklace being here," Bin T'an Ho told them. "And I hear many things. The sacred blue beads came from the neck of a great lama, Mr. Kingsley?"

"He took it off and gave it to me."

"Is it so?" the Chinese asked, and Kingsley felt the other was positive the white man was lying. "And now it is gone. How careless!"

"But you're going to help us find it?"

Bin T'an Ho rubbed his hands together.

"I will do what I can," he agreed. His little black eyes, set deep in pouchy flesh, began to shine, and then became blank as pools. *"Hai-ae!* I will come to look at your new merchandise, gentlemen. We could use some new silks. Bin Quong also has a daughter, and she will need a marriage headdress. Perhaps, since we are good friends, you will not charge the Four Families too much should we see something to our fancy?"

Kingsley thought.

"I'm wrong again. The turquoise necklace certainly can't be hidden anywhere in a headdress, and all the silks were examined. Just the same, I'll see that another look-see is taken." He said aloud, agreeably, fencing, looking for a clue, a loophole, anything:

"I'll show you the stuff myself. I can tell you the story of the lucky brides who wore the headdresses. Bin Quong's favorite Little Flower will be extremely fortunate, and bear many male children, if she is married under one of our headdresses."

"You Americans! What merchants you are; you think of everything! I will investigate your newest goods. *Ni tik ye i'tik t'ai ho ka.*"

"That was too fast for me," Kingsley lied serenely.

"I said I trusted the prices would be low," which was the truth, although the Chinese was trying out Kingsley's knowledge of Cantonese. "Yes, money is a thing in these days. And a wedding! Ee! The Four Families must do it in style, for Bin Quong is an important man, and we do not wish the other tongs to laugh at us. The Water Fairy Children tea we have bought! The ducks! The hogs, already being fattened on sweet sugar cane! And—" smiling—"since you are men of men, I can add, the money we have paid for brandy to warm our souls at the feast!" In the same ecstatic voice, as if his ponderous body were glorying in the thought of rich food and hot drink, "You will not forget our order for the Chinese liquor?"

"Didn't know we'd booked one," said Carstairs frankly. "Out of my department. But I'll look it up. We've been short, you know."

"Without *ng-ko-pi,*" rumbled Bin T'an Ho, "a wedding would be sad indeed."

"If it's for a Four Families wedding," Carstairs promised, "it will come as a present."

"Ah-he! Chan yau sam lok! Such kindness." Bin T'an Ho laughed all over his fat body, but Kingsley, smiling with him, saw the thin mouth pinch tighter for an instant. "It was a great bother, getting permission from the Big Red House* to secure good Chinese liquor. It will be talked about for a long time in Chinatown, my friends. *Ng-ko-pi* of the strength of the Tiger

*The Custom House

is expensive—that is what we ordered—and if by some miracle it can be delivered, the Four Families will never forget it."

"A case was included with my goods," said Kingsley. "You're lucky, Bin T'an Ho. Not much of it is available, even in China."

"That case—" began Carstairs.

Kingsley shut him off.

"I know," he said swiftly. "I'd promised to sell it to some concern here in Chinatown, if they were able to take delivery. But I'll talk to 'em, and that way it can be turned over to the Four Families."

Bin T'an Ho said gravely—

"If you will tell me the name of your friends, Mr. Kingsley, I promise they will be delighted to let us have it."

The A-I man thought of the high-binders below, of the hatchetmen who must be sprawled at ease in some hidden chamber of the tong, and believed it. He said:

"I'll see to it. I won't forget."

"Don't," said Bin T'an Ho.

"I'm not going to," the white man told him.

FOR the time it would have taken for a mouthful of rice to reach the lips of the big Chinese, there was silence, and steady gray eyes met unwinking black ones. Then Bin T'an Ho chuckled.

"All this makes me very happy. In return for this kindness, if you secure the sacred necklace, we will pay out of our treasury not five thousand gold, but six, and we will say nothing to your company of the extra thousand. Is it agreed?"

The two white men looked up at the ceiling.

"We will not do it crudely," laughed the Chinese. "Some day, in the mail, you will merely receive a token of our esteem. Now—I am very sorry, but I have many important matters—"

As the pair tried to shake hands, and Bin T'an Ho, instead, drew his into his sleeves and bowed, a thin voice deep in the building demanded:

"Bin T'an Ho! Is all well, O fat brother of the thunder cloud?"

"All is well," said Bin T'an Ho. "Rest easy, honorable elder brother."

The thin voice, higher pitched than before, asked, *"Wai du rya?"* all in one rapid sound.

Bin T'an Ho again answered in Cantonese, although the other had questioned him in Tibetan.

"All is well, *po'o*—grandfather," he said. As he bowed ceremoniously, possibly ironically, to the white men, he said, "I can not be out of my revered old person's sight for long without his demanding something! Tea, at this middle morning hour! Is it not ridiculous?"

"Very," said Kingsley dryly. He added, accenting the words incorrectly, and with the cadence and upper tones wrong, *"Ch'ang ch'ang ch'yat cho'i.* Goodby."

"How well you speak our language," complimented Bin T'an Ho pleasantly. "Next time we visit, perhaps I will be able to save a drop or two of Tiger brandy, and we will speak entirely in Chinese, eh? You will let me know about this person who will now permit us to have the liquor?"

"Look it up as soon as we get back," Carstairs agreed. "I'll see to it—that Kingsley has it delivered to you. That's a promise."

"Good," said the Chinese. "But we must really pay for it, in this case—"

"What we send you will be a present," Kingsley told him placidly.

"How happy you make me! How we will all appreciate this!"

The white men were walking side by side down toward the A-I offices on California Street before Kingsley said:

"How they'd appreciate it! You and I'd be the joke of Chinatown, Carstairs. It was so complicated, and now I've a notion it is really damnably simple. We'll see."

"I get a little of it all, George, but

even that's not entirely clear. You mean—"

"I mean," George Kingsley said quietly, "that Bin T'an Ho thinks we're really fools, and no match for his Oriental cleverness. That's why he slipped up. He didn't give us much as antagonists. Here are the slips: First, he led into the talk about Tiger brandy through talk about food, and a Chinese never discusses liquor he drinks except to buy it. You know that. Second, he was too insistent about a particular brand of *ng-ko-pi*—the sort which was in the shipment. Third, what the old man called out was Tibetan—*wai du rya*. Azure stones. Turquoise. It isn't the common word, which was why I remembered it. The head lama used it, but common lamas did not. It stuck in my mind."

"So we look in the case of liquor again, do we? Open the bottles, and find the turquoises disintegrated, which makes us the queen of the May."

"Maybe. We look."

"Then what?"

Kingsley said:

"Old man, I was damn near killed in Shanghai, and I didn't like it. I wouldn't trust this Bin T'an Ho around the corner. What do we do? We go have a long talkee-talkee with the police, and then we go over to the Red Brick Building, or whatever the Chino called it, and get the turquoise necklace—maybe."

"If you make Bin T'an Ho mad, George, you'll get a knife in your back."

"Maybe. I'll let you listen when I tell him we're sorry, but the case has got to be delivered to somebody else. We'll tell him who—get the name out of the telephone book. There'll be activity among the Four Families hatchetmen, if I'm not crazy with the heat."

"Too complicated for me. But I'll stick."

"Everything Chinese is complicated. Puzzling. I've just been lucky. Now, let's go find us a nice Irish sergeant of detectives, and see what it gets us."

It got them what they wanted.

Manahey, of the Chinatown squad, said in the richest brogue:

"I never heard such dom nonsense," and added, in perfect Cantonese, *"Kü kü tu hi' tak no kong.* I agree absolutely."

Heads went together. In a few minutes the sergeant was talking earnestly with a high Treasury Department official.

By three in the afternoon—*sam tim*—Bin T'an Ho was informed by messenger that the Asiatic-Import regretted exceedingly being unable to deliver the wanted case, but were instead willing to deliver two cases of Green Dragon, as a gift. By three-thirty, a few minutes over the time it took for a cab to reach the A-I offices when it was first necessary to talk something over, Bin T'an Ho arrived, requesting the Tiger branded case in the name of friendship, love, future relations and the Nine Greater Gods. Before four o'clock, Bin T'an Ho, cleverly, painstakingly, for all his haste, managed to worm out of a reluctant Carstairs the name of the Chinese who was to get the case; Bin T'an Ho said smoothly that this other Chinese—the A-I man gave the name of the head of a rival, powerful tong—would gladly turn the case over to them. Which Kingsley, smoking in a corner of the office, knew was a lie.

The astute Bin T'an Ho even found out when and where the case was to be delivered and, having got this information, left in entirely too much of a hurry. It was, as Kingsley said, very bad manners.

Just the same, Carstairs and Kingsley, a little later, departed pretty rapidly themselves.

A FEW minutes before five a truck marked Asiatic-Import drew up at the loading platform of the Big Red House; a truck built for heavy service, the sides high, the top covered with black tarred material against fog or

rain. The driver opened the heavy black cloth flap at the end and signed for the Tiger branded case; he let the engine roar a moment, and then started toward Chinatown. Soon, in low gear, the truck pounded over the cobbles up the hills which had once been sand dunes.

Behind the truck was a little roadster, Chinese driven. Kingsley, looking through a slit in the tarpaulin, had an idea that the driver was a youngster he had formerly taught at the university. He wasn't sure. When the roadster slipped ahead of the truck—at the start of the final long block leading into the main street of Chinatown—Manahey stroked his chin.

He said to his squad:

"I'm thinkin' it will be when we're almost at th' top, boys. Go easy. Unless they try to finish Joe on th' driver's seat. That'll be up t' all of us, but princip'ly to you, Williams."

A strange truckload, different from anything ever carried in the big A-I machine, ground slowly up the steep incline. There was Manahey, blue eyes becoming harder as he waited; there were six men from the Chinatown detail, knowing perfectly what they were facing. There was Corporal Williams, crouched below the driver's seat; below, and behind, with an ugly weapon ready to hand, the dreaded police chopper, no longer called a machine gun. It did just that—chopped them down.

And Carstairs and Kingsley, warned to keep out of harm's way, although, as Manahey said, it was not probable that the "long, skinny feller with th' brown face would sit when other men were fightin'." Lastly, two quiet men from the Treasury Department. Twelve men and the driver, who was also on the force.

Nob Hill, beyond Chinatown, stopped the sun. The steep street was black with shadow; black and entirely deserted. Chinese children were not running about. No women, having placed the pot of evening rice over fire, gossiped about doorways. No corpulent merchants smoked a long cool pipe and thought of China and many sons. The street was empty. The tong of the Four Families had posted a Blood Sign, in scarlet and black, announcing that they intended vengeance, but—such a thing had never happened before!—not saying where it would fall. Therefore Chinatown put up its shutters and Sergeant Manahey, hearing the report from a beat patrolman, knew that trouble was in the wind.

Without turning his head, the truck's driver growled:

"Four chinks at th' top of th' hill, Sarge. An' more in th' doorways."

"Keep away from knives, Joe," Manahey ordered. "Don't go for your gun, either. Williams'll take care o' you."

"Yeah," said the driver laconically. "Hope they lemme get on th' brakes . . . One of 'em's comin' out in th' street, Sarge."

Another of the Chinatown Squad said quietly:

"Two men slipped out of a doorway. It's a Bin house. Hands in their sleeves. 'Binders."

"Take your time," Manahey snapped. "I'll give th' word. We want 'em, as many as we c'n grab. Got a lot of old 'ndictments waitin' for Four Families hatchetmen. You stay in the truck, Mr. Kingsley."

George Kingsley didn't answer. The palms of his hands were growing moist, just as they had up in the distant Tibetan pass. The scar on his cheek became red and angry, although the remainder of his face was curiously pale.

A Chinese voice squealed:

"I show you where put box! You stop; I come ride."

"Sure," said the driver, and carefully, methodically, jammed on his brake.

Before the wheels stopped turning the Chinese had twisted his way to the seat, and another had come miraculously fast, gliding over the cobbles, from the other side. The two were on either side of the driver. Knives appeared from sleeves.

"Sit still," commanded one of the Chinese. "Or we kill."

"Yeah," said the driver. "Sure. What's th' matter, anyhow?"

Chinese swarmed toward the truck; Manahey said softly—

"Let's go, boys!"

Some one shrilled a warning; a knife was hurled. For a split second the hatchetmen must have contemplated resistance, for one of the squad was forced to fire to save the life of a fellow officer.

On the seat itself was drama. Two heavy *bo' how doy* blades sprang up at the same instant; Williams pressed the trigger once, but before he could swing his weapon about the second knife was descending. Kingsley was on his feet. His fist caught the down driving forearm in one fierce blow; the blade clattered to the street.

Kingsley suddenly was oblivious of shouts, of how the fight might be going. He saw, standing against a building near the corner, the big form of Bin T'an Ho; he saw the Four Families man turn to leave. How Kingsley sprawled out of the truck he could never have told. Somehow, he gained the seat and climbed furiously over the clawing, biting hatchetman; somehow, he was racing up the street. He caught Bin T'an Ho just as the fat man was waddling into a basket shop, owned by a Bin, from where doubtless he would have vanished completely.

Kingsley's hand reached a portly shoulder:

"*Ai—ee!*" said the Chinese. "My good friend, Kingsley! I was watching the unfortunate affair—"

"Watch out," roared Manahey's voice. "He's going to—"

Kingsley smashed down at the sleeve covered hands so rapidly that Bin T'an Ho's bullet spanged against the pavement, burying itself finally in a keg of packed mustard stems.

"Good boy!" Manahey cried to the Chinese, as he tore the gun away from the Four Families man's pudgy fingers. "Now you've fixed it for us! Attempted assault's as good as anything else. Got you this time, Bin!"

"*Ni mo kü lai tak go!* You have no right to arrest me. This man attacked, and I merely protected myself—"

"For years I been waitin' for you to tell it to th' judge," growled the sergeant. "Thanks to Mr. Kingsley, I'm doin' it now, and I'm a happy man. Hmm." He frowned at the Chinese. "I thought you told me Gee Yee Ging ran away, after he killed that old man, Bin? An' now we round him up, along with the rest of the hatchetmen, tryin' to hijack a truck. How come?"

"Ask the Four Families attorney!"

"Sure." Manahey glanced at the handcuffs now on the Chinese's wrists. "Accordin' to what Mr. Kingsley says, Bin, those ain't as pretty as th' necklace."

"I do not know what you speak about!"

"Don't get excited." The officer grinned. "We'll show you. 'Tis a sheer waste of time, keepin' you out of jail, but it's glad I am to accommodate my friends in the Custom House, and Mr. Kingsley also. Come along, Bin."

AN AMBULANCE and a police machine had already stopped on the narrow street. At an order from Manahey the 'binders were loaded into the truck, the wounded into the ambulance, and the case of Tiger brandy transferred from truck to automobile. Bin T'an Ho glanced at the case only once, seemingly without the slightest interest.

Back in the Big Red Building the paunchy tongman was conducted to one of the offices, facing south and west. From it the curved roofs of Chinatown were plainly visible.

Jorgensen, the appraiser of Oriental wares, stood beside his chief's desk. On the desk were the twelve bottles of liquor, squat, heavy, brown in color. The case which had been in the truck was empty. Bin T'an Ho's gaze flicked

to the bottles, but again he said nothing.

"Good afternoon, Bin," said the chief. "Here's the Tiger brandy. I understand you were pretty anxious to get it."

Bin T'an Ho spread out his hands.

"There is to be a wedding," he said briefly. A bland look spread over his face. "However, O Important Personage, I do not understand all this talk of necklaces, or what it means to me."

"Show him," the chief said briefly to Kingsley.

George Kingsley picked up a bottle, turned it over and glanced at the bottom. He did this with several of the brown clay containers, until he found the one he wanted. After this, he turned the bottle on its side, and did the same with several others. All appeared similar. None seemed to have been tampered with, but the clay glazed bottle Kingsley had singled out looked to be, on the bottom, of slightly lighter texture than the others.

Kingsley pressed his two thumbs against the bottom. Instantly a round disk of the semi-porcelain slid in, while the other half circle of the disk was pushed out. Kingsley thrust a forefinger into the aperture, so swiftly that the watchers could hardly follow the motion; he drew out something in brown wool, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he moistened the palm of his hand with saliva, and rubbed it against the bottom of the bottle. As he righted the container, the cleverly made disk slid into place again.

"In a moment the wetted Ho-nan clay will harden," Kingsley said. To Jorgensen, "I was able to pick out the proper bottle the first time, now, because the color of the clay was lighter than any of the others, having been the last one we closed. Interesting, isn't it, Bin T'an Ho?"

"Very," said the Chinese, smiling, "but only as a trick."

"And a good one," Kingsley said, smiling also. "I've seen Chinese, fearing the beating of their masters, carry a supply of Ho-nan clay in their sleeves; clay stained blue. They can repair a broken plate too fast for the eye to follow. Almost like magic."

"What has that got to do with me?"

"Well," the chief said, "the other eleven bottles contained first chop opium, Bin. A great scheme. Specially made bottles, containing liquor which must be passed by the Treasury Department—and Uncle Sam himself delivering the opium safely to you. That's perfect smuggling."

"Of which," the Chinese said, "I know nothing at all."

"You were pretty anxious to get this case of Tiger brandy," the chief reminded him.

"I was anxious to have the Four Families wedding celebration a good one."

"He thinks we've forgotten what happened up in Chinatown," grunted Sergeant Manahey.

Kingsley, without watching the Chinese, cautiously drew the little bundle of wool from his pocket. With utmost care he pulled particles of wool apart, until, bit by bit, the Tibetan necklace was revealed.

The room was very quiet now. Kingsley had warned against conversation.

Bin T'an Ho, lips gray, attempted to keep his eyes from the magnificent ancient gems strung on braided silver wire. In Kingsley's hand were the priceless gems, graduated in color from the pale blue of a morning sky to the deepest midnight color of lapis, then fading again to light green, which graduated off to the emerald-like hue of fine jade —all polished by years, generations, of hanging about the necks of Tibetan high priests. Emblem of the gods of Thunder; of the Four Families . . .

Kingsley bent his head slightly, and started to place the turquoise necklace over his head.

Automatically Bin T'an Ho's lips parted. Words were wrung from him, in his own border dialect:

"O gods of the underworld! Here is a white devil who attempts to desecrate the symbol of our tong, that we have brought here to worship—"

"That's enough," Kingsley said to the officials. "I can swear to it."

Bin T'an Ho was not done. He wailed:

"O Four Families! Family of Bin, of H'ung, of Mi'i from the Tibetan hills, of Ko'u!" and then, realizing what the white man had said, he shifted to breathless English, "Some day, Kingsley, you will be found dead. Some day we will—"

"Not you," Manahey growled, covering the twisting mouth. "You won't do anything, Bin. 'Tis dead to rights we have you, an' th' Treasury Department as well. You better save your voice. You'll need a good lie t' tell th' jury, Bin." Despite this, he added to George Kingsley, "Be careful, though, sir. Maybe th' Four Families have a few 'binders left. A couple just come in on a boat for 'em yesterday, an' when they're trained, they'll be deadly, lookin' for a chance to establish an American reputation."

"Right."

Kingsley said to the officials:

"This establishes the Four Families tong as the one behind both the opium smuggling and the theft of the turquoise necklace. Bin T'an Ho's anxiety to get the Tiger brandy started me on the trail. He didn't know I understood Oriental customs, and a little Tibetan to boot, although he tried me out this morning."

Bin T'an Ho snarled an obscene word at him.

"The Tiger brandy, looking properly old, was sold to us in Shanghai, and we shipped it here. While Shanghai was ready to pack it, and the rest of the shipment, I showed up with the turquoise necklace. A Shanghai Bin tongman, knowing the opium scheme, slipped out enough opium to get the necklace inside one of the false bottoms—"

"I should think you'd be more careful in packing such valuable things," Jorgensen said.

"Ordinarily, we are," Kingsley admitted. "However, Shanghai was in turmoil when the crates were packed. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. It was the start of this present trouble, sir. Normally, the substitution couldn't have been made, although it was pretty diabolically clever.

"Of course, we searched the packing coolies after the shipment was sealed. It's obvious, now, that with our Shanghai people excited over possible war, and less careful than usual, the turquoise was lifted out of its little packet of wool and shoved into the opened bottom of one of the bottles."

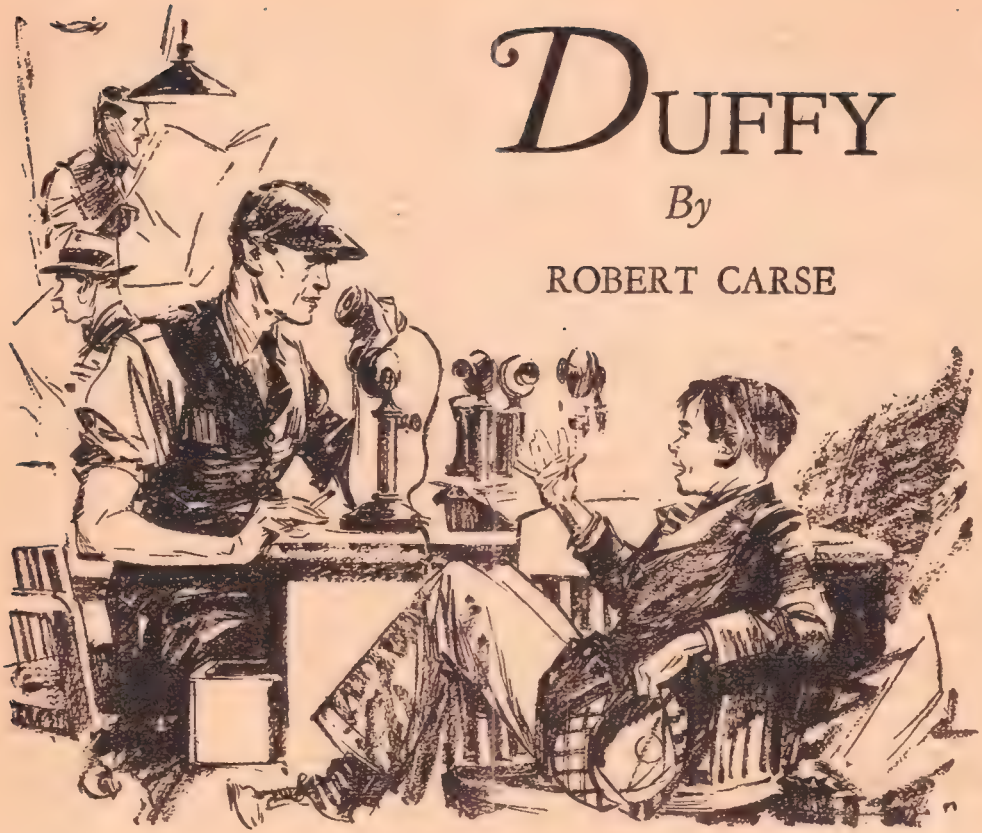
"A fairy tale for foreign children," spat Bin T'an Ho, attempting to extricate himself even now.

"Th' cablegram you received th' day th' shipment left China was no fairy tale," Manahey said. "We thought it was code this afternoon when we were checkin' up. But Mr. Kingsley knew it was somethin' else—Tibetan."

Bin T'an Ho's beady eyes, set deep in flesh, flicked up to meet those of the white man.

"Not only will you be found dead," he snarled, "but your fingers will be gone, and your toes and your eyes—"

"That," George Kingsley said quietly, "is Chinatown talk. I learned my swearing up in L'asa, and that's where they know what a threat really is, Bin."



DUFFY

By

ROBERT CARSE

A Story of the Metropolis

WHILE the presses had been going some of the men in the city room had found excuses to rap at their machines, or to talk. Now that the presses upstairs had stopped, the big room was silent. It was, thought Duffy, as if the presses were a heart. When they stopped everything stopped. But, Duffy admitted to himself, crossing the city room with the Boss's copy of the bulldog edition under his arm, that was a hell of a thought. Things had stopped, yes. The sheet was through—sold. But it would go on, amalgamated, even though it wasn't the same old sheet. And he and the Boss would string along with it.

The Boss sat as usual with his feet high up on the city desk. His cracked and patched eyeshade was hung over his telephone—where he always hung it when the first edition had been put to bed. There was a lighted cigaret in a corner of his mouth and an unlighted one stuck behind his left ear. His vest was unbuttoned and his thumbs were hooked in the bright red and blue suspenders his wife had given him last Christmas. He looked very much as usual, thought Duffy, somehow surprised to recognize that he felt pleased to find him so.

"What's it say tonight, Duffy?" asked the Boss, holding out a hand for the paper Duffy extended to him.

"I dunno," said Duffy, grave faced.

"No spik good Ingliss."

That, for Duffy was just the regular evening's ritual with the Boss. He looked around him; all of the copy readers and telegraph desk men had moved away from the city desk down the room, and were standing about with the street and rewrite men—all except Hurley, who sat at the far corner, drunk and asleep.

Duffy pushed the city news copy spike out of his way and pulled himself up so that he sat on the edge of the desk.

"How's it going wit' youse?" he asked.

"Not so good," he said. He spoke just as if Duffy had asked him whether he needed another packet of cigarets from the corner. But Duffy caught immediately the slight, serious undertone which seldom or never was in the Boss's voice.

"What's th' matter?"

"Not much."

"What's th' matter, Boss?"

The Boss smiled, took the cigaret from behind his ear and lighted it with what remained of the one between his lips. He slowly exhaled smoke as he answered—

"Gummy Riggen and I and this new owner, Schleet, had a run-around this afternoon before I went to work—"

The Boss stopped speaking. He and Duffy sat silent for a time, perhaps five or six minutes. Then the Boss went on:

"Schleet's out to make dough from the newspaper business in a big way. This is the first metropolitan daily he's bought, and he plans to run it like he does the rest of the chain he has out of town. Efficiency—more efficiency."

"Nuts!" said Duffy.

The Boss nodded.

"He's bringing in a lot of his own men from his rags in Cleveland and Washington. He'll have them all in here by tomorrow. A lot of the boys here will be out in the street; a whole lot." The Boss changed the position of his hands on the suspender straps. "He wants me to be head of his new rewrite desk."

"You?" asked Duffy. His eyes were wider than he knew. "And who is he gonna slap in here fer night city editor?"

"Some other guy; I think it's the bird who's been his city editor down in Washington."

"Chees!" said Duffy. Sharp, small lines formed about his eyes and his mouth. "An' what'd you tell 'im?"

"To go to hell."

"Huh?"

Duffy's mouth slacked open, just a little bit. The Boss had a wife and three kids, and a house with two mortgages. All three of the kids were in school; one of them was almost as old as Duffy. He pondered these things in silence for awhile. And then, more respectfully, more hesitantly than he had ever addressed the Boss in a long time—

"Whatcha do that for?"

The Boss grinned at Duffy:

"For a couple of reasons. I've been working this town for twenty years. I've been on this sheet for fourteen, and held down this desk for eight. No guy, amalgamation or otherwise, is going to come in here, take my job, give me orders, get better pay and use my knowledge of the town to keep his own job. Not right now. Not while I wear this size pants."

The Boss shook his head and inaccurately flipped his cigaret butt toward a spittoon.

"And that isn't all."

The Boss did not look at Duffy as he spoke; he looked somewhere down the long city room, where now there was the sound of slightly hysterical laughter and the jarring clank of bottles against the edges of desks and glasses. The Boss ran his hands over and through his thin, fine hair.

"All those lads who are staying are taking a bad salary cut; Gummy Riggen, the guy who's been managing editor here for nine years, gets knocked almost forty per cent."

Obliquely, Duffy had also been watching the scene down at the other end of the room; in his newspaper experience

this was the first "firing party" he had seen. But now he swung his wide, blue and very sharp eyes back to the Boss's face.

"That means us copy kids, too? They gonna hack somethin' offa our twelve smacks a week?"

"No, not off yours."

"Huh?" It was mechanical, and Duffy's lips stayed parted after he said it.

"Not off yours," repeated the Boss. "You were fired, along with me, this afternoon, Duffy."

DUFFY slid to the floor from the desk. The copy spike clattered with him and rolled across the floor, but he did not pick it up. He did not even notice it. In the side pockets of his tight blue serge trousers his hands were clenched. He stood with his feet apart, and the calves of his stocky legs stood out prominently.

"Listen," he advised the Boss in a quick, sharp voice. "Come clean wit' me! You resign because they wouldn't keep me?"

"No." The Boss was looking squarely at him. "I told you why I quit. I held out for you, of course. But I was all set to quit anyway."

Inside his pockets Duffy's hands trembled. Dimly, he was glad that they were hidden there. It was rather difficult for him to keep his voice level.

"What they firin' me fer—because I'm a little guy?"

"I guess so." The Boss's voice was quite soft. "When I asked them, it was about the only reason they could give."

"Yeah?"

Duffy shut his eyes for a moment. In that moment, he gave himself the fleeting pleasure of imagining he was taking a good sock at Mr. Schleet's jaw.

"Won't they ever get over t'at?" he hoarsely asked. "Don't them monkeys know I got a work card, that I gotta right t' work? Ain't they sure I'm fourteen, damn near fifteen? Chees—ain't I licked every guy in this shop, up ta seventeen years old?"

"You have," said the Boss. He tried not to smile. "I've seen you."

"Yeah." Duffy forced a smile. He took his square, scarred hands from his pockets and looked at them. "Th' dumb bananas!" he said. "Just because I'm a little guy, and got a kid's pan on me. Ain't I done me work all right since youse've knew me?"

"Sure you have," said the Boss.

He drew two cigarets from the packet in his lower vest pocket; he put one in his mouth and the other behind his right ear.

"But it's your pan, I guess, Duffy. They spoke of that."

He looked at Duffy, as if once more to see for himself. Duffy was trying to scowl. It did him no good; despite it, and despite the ink splotches on his forehead and the dim remnants of a shiner under one eye, Duffy looked strikingly like a small, red headed, freckled, but very beautiful minor edition of a Gaelic angel.

"Your face, and your size, too, I guess," ended the Boss. "They said you didn't look almost fifteen years old."

"Who said that?"

"Schleet himself. He must have noticed you the other night when he was around here sitting in with Gummy Riggen. Anyhow, he told me this afternoon he wanted no children of that age working on his newspapers."

"He did, huh?" Duffy's scowl increased. "Well, to hell with him then! I wouldn't work fer a guy—a dirty—"

"You're right," said the Boss. "You and me, too, Duffy." He stopped speaking; he picked up and revolved a pencil he took from the desk in front of him, finally put it down. "Your mother fit to work, Duffy?"

"No." Duffy spoke only after a moment of silence, and then with great reluctance. "She ain't. She's shot full o' rheumatism. Washin' them big tile floors ain't no job fer a lady."

The Boss nodded.

"How would it be then," he asked very

slowly, "if you and she came to stay with us, up at my house, for awhile. Maybe she could cook and help my Old Lady out around the house."

"Listen!" commanded Duffy. "Listen! Who youse talkin' to—me?"

He rapped himself violently on the chest to make certain that his identity and question were understood.

"Whatcha think I am—a punk, er a cripple? Don't worry about me; ain't the first time I been on th' scram in this town! But how about youse?"

The Boss tapped the end of his cigaret with a tobacco stained finger. He smiled.

"I'm going to free lance. I'm going to write a flock of articles and a book. I'm going to knock 'em cockeyed, up in publishers' row. I'm going to bat out all the stuff I've been promising myself for years. I haven't given a typewriter an honest look in the keyboard since I've been sitting in on this desk."

Duffy nodded, quite shortly. He had heard and overheard other men, other newspapermen, say the same things, in almost the same words. He had seen them give up their jobs and go smiling forth through the swinging doors of the city room. And he had seen almost all of them come back—a month, six months, a year later—looking for their old jobs, and sometimes finding them.

"That'll be O.K," said Duffy. "That ought to give youse a big kick fer a time. But ain't there any other jobs around town?"

"Not this town, and not this year."

"Well—" Duffy passed the palm of one hand over the battle marked knuckles of the other—"any time youse wanta come back, they'll have ya. They'll prob'ly send fer you within two weeks; there ain't another copy pusher in town who's got the inside on that Korcher case like you got. An' I know."

"You do," said the Boss. "We're carrying two columns on it this morning, most of it a statement from old Judge Wegge. Says he can't do a damn thing, literally, until they find Korcher; the whole investigation will just die standing up. And from what the boys down at headquarters say, the bulls don't know where Korcher is or was, and won't know for a long, long time. Why don't you break that story for the town, Duffy?"

"I t'ink I will." Duffy found a grin. "If youse is going to go off writin' books, I'd better. Because there ain't two better guys in town."

"Yes." The Boss grinned back. "They'll find that out. Here." He had reached into the drawer of his desk, and now he held out to Duffy a small, flat, thin and very familiar envelop. "I got your pay this afternoon before the cashier's office closed. And I knocked our new sweetheart, Schleet, over the head for two weeks' extra pay for both of us. I got it this afternoon because I figured you wouldn't want to be coming back here tomorrow to draw your pay."

"Thanks," said Duffy. "You was right." Without opening it, he pocketed the envelop. "Tomorra I'll be on th' lam."

"What are you going to do?"

Duffy winked.

"Find this blote, Korcher. Whacha think?" The smile left his face. "Youse want coffee now?"

"No. I'm set. I'll just have to hang around and send up the second when it's through. Then I'm done. Probably some of the boys will want to go out for a drink then."

"They will," prophesied Duffy.

He reached into a back trousers pocket and brought out a faded, checkered cap. On it he slowly and carefully wiped his right hand. Then he held that hand out to the Boss, tugging down the cap in place with the other.

"Well, so long, and thanks, Boss."

"So long, Duffy." The Boss spoke very slowly, looking up as he did so, his tired eyes twitching in the powerful overhead light. He released his hand, sat back more in his creaking swivel chair. "Don't take any bum wooden money."

"Nope." Duffy shook his head. "No spik good Ingliss."

DUFFY was smiling as he turned away. The smile was part of the ritual, as had been the Boss's admonition to him, and his own answer to it. But, as Duffy strode down the aisle between the desks and toward the door of the city room, his face was grave and his eyes were almost closed. Pushing against the swinging door, just as he would rush at an antagonist whom he was about to fight, he told himself that he had liked this rotten, dirty old dump a lot. So much so he couldn't stand to hang around it any more. Not now, anyhow. And not when he felt like this . . .

The light was on in the other room when he let himself in the flat. He opened the door and stood there looking in and shaking the snow particles from his cap.

"How are you, ma?"

"All right." She smiled up at him from the bed, pointing to the pile of green, blue and pink pages at the foot of it. "I been reading them tabloids again."

"How many times I told youse not to read them things? They ain't newspapers."

"No." The smile returned as she saw the complete gravity of his face. "But ain't they fun? That pink one has a little real news tonight; it says th' city has just offered a ten-thousand-dollar reward fer anybody who finds that man, Korcher."

"Yeah." Duffy was shucking his cap and mackinaw. "I'm takin' that on tomorra. I got a coupla good hot tips on that guy; he ain't been killed, I think, an' I think he's here, bunked away somewheres in th' burg; yeah, in Manhattan. There's two big mobs in town who this investigation could hurt a hull lot, if ole Judge Wegge could get this guy, Korcher, on th' stand. One of them two mobs parceled this public accountant guy, Korcher; he's on th' square, himself. An' they'll keep 'im bunked until Wegge quits, for th' reason he ain't got nothin' t' go on any more wit'—"

Duffy smiled.

"You an' me could use ten grand, huh, ma?"

He reached down into a pocket, took out the flat, thin envelop, tossed it over to her on the bed.

"I got through down at th' paper tonight. Me an' the Boss, we both got through. But there's two weeks extry in there. There ain't no more jobs downtown. It's a bad year. I'm goin' out on th' block tomorra an' twist me a paper sellin' job outa Lips Scuata."

Her face was also grave now—

"Don't get in trouble."

"Not much. No more'n I'll give." He grinned at her as he shut the door.

"NOW, listen," advised Duffy, leaning a bit closer across the counter of the newsstand toward Lips Scuata. "Get wise. I know all them paper handlers downtown, an' I know most of the guys on th' trucks. I can get all th' editions up here, both mornin' and evenin', half an hour after they're off th' presses. Get me?"

Scuata straightened up a little inside his stall. With his wide, thick, hair covered hands, he pushed all the magazines and newspapers to one end of the counter. He did this before he spoke; watching him—the swarthy, square, expressionless face and the button-like eyes—Duffy understood that he was supposed to understand what the gesture meant. Duffy smiled, still waiting for Scuata to speak.

"No," said Scuata. "I don' get ya. An' what would it be if I did get ya?"

Duffy stopped smiling. He didn't want to hit Scuata. The Italian was twenty years old, heavy and strong. He had been in and out of the reformatory twice; but he now stood in with some of the local Hell's Kitchen big shots, and if a scrap with him got over to the station house, Scuata would be in the right,

and Duffy in the wrong.

Duffy spoke slowly, consciously trying to forget the fact that he had red hair, and that both his father and his mother had been born Irish.

"Cut it out, Lips," he said. "I'm on th' square. I want a job. I'm tellin' youse why."

"Ye're tellin' me nuttin'."

Then, as Duffy had expected, Scuata vaulted agilely over the counter and stood beside him on the sidewalk outside the stand. He stepped up to Duffy and lowered his unshaven face level with Duffy's eyes.

"I'm tellin' youse I want no smart tommy like youse in my racket. Now, scram!"

"Oh, yeah?" asked Duffy, and as he spoke he hit Scuata square on the jaw.

They fought for all of ten minutes. Scuata knocked Duffy down four times, pushed into the crowd which had gathered. The third time Scuata followed him, and tried to kick him in the side or groin as he fell. Scuata's worn shoe heel slipped on the slick corner of the curb as he did so, and he almost fell himself, waving his arms wildly. It was then that Duffy had a chance to come to his own feet and take another full, free swing at Scuata's jaw. But the Sicilian was still erect, and hit back, hard. He had struck twice more when the crowd closed in and separated them; several bystanders pushed Scuata away, down the block.

Duffy stood reeling. His cap was gone, stolen by some one in the crowd. All the buttons were missing from the front of his tight-fitting blue serge jacket, the only one he owned. Duffy looked at the crowd.

"Are youse," he asked hoarsely, "waitin' fer me t' pass th' hat? G'wan—scram!"

The crowd went, rather silently, and with it Scuata, although Duffy did not particularly notice how. Only one man lingered, leaning against Scuata's deserted newsstand and studying Duffy. Duffy did not pay much attention to him; from the sidewalk he picked up the scattered buttons of his jacket. Then he turned around and started back up the block. He was almost at his own stoop when the man, who had been following him, tapped him on the shoulder.

Duffy stopped. He stood still and looked up. It was the same man who had stayed after the crowd had left, who had leaned against Scuata's newsstand. He was a small man. He wore a very light and tight topcoat and a shaggy gray fedora hat with a little bit of red feather stuck inside the bright green band. At once and instinctively Duffy recognized the type, although he did not know the man. This was a "hot", a gangster.

"Ah, shove off," said Duffy, beginning to feel his reaction now.

"Shut that satchel and listen to me." The other spoke very quietly, and there was a small and quick grin on his face. "I got a good set-up for ya."

"On th' square?"

"Square. Tail me down th' block. I'll meet ya out on Ninth by the gyp drugstore."

"On yer way," said Duffy.

"HOW'S th' pan?" asked the other when they had met at the drugstore and gone inside to sit undisturbed at a small glass-topped table.

"O.K."

"You need anyt'ing for it?"

"Nothing it ain't got now."

The man Duffy believed to be a gangster allowed himself a grin as he lighted a cigaret. He opened and threw back his tight topcoat. He wore a gun holstered low down on his left side, Duffy saw, and he made no effort to disguise the fact. Duffy liked him for that, and remained quiet, waiting for the man to speak. He did—

"Youse should make a lotta gilt with that pan, kid."

"How?"

"I'll tell ya how—" hands caught

loosely in his topcoat pockets, the man across the table studied Duffy for another minute or so in silence—"if ye're on th' up-an'-up."

"I am."

Duffy did not move; his expression did not change. There was one clerk in the place, who now stood at the other end of the long room, looking desultorily out through the glass doors at the morning traffic on Ninth Avenue. The clerk had not spoken to them when they came in, had not even asked them for an order. But, in the mirror, Duffy had seen his companion nod very briefly to the clerk. Duffy knew who ran this drugstore, and a dozen others like it in midtown Manhattan; practically everybody in the neighborhood did. It was a more or less tacitly accepted fact that Kid Bergen and his mob ran this joint and the others in the chain as retail clearing houses for the mob's booze and dope traffic. This man before him here was, he suspected, and was almost sure, a gangster. It wasn't a long tumble then to figure this guy as a hot in Kid Bergen's mob.

"Spill it," prodded Duffy, remembering his knowledge of the Korcher case, the city, and the two big mobs which ran it, one of which was Kid Bergen's. "All I gotta do is say no."

The man in the light topcoat laughed outright.

"If you ain't a laugh," he said, "with that pan." Then, noticing Duffy's instant scowl, he went on, speaking more quickly, "What's yer racket?"

"I was a copy kid on a paper downtown. They give me an envelop last night."

"Hard lines." The other pushed back the shaggy hat from his slickly greased black hair. "You know a bull, a flatfoot, when ya see one?"

Duffy grinned.

"I ain't missed one yet. I was drug up aroun' here, an' aroun' th' Row."

"Yeah, but any bulls know you?"

"On'y a couple, from the house in 47th Street. No hot shot headquarters dicks. An' I'll lay good dough I c'n spot any o' them *schlamiels* long before they put th' finger on me."

"I'll lay dough along wit' you, ya can. Well, that's all I want. Ya get me?" he asked.

Duffy openly looked around the store before he answered—

"Sure."

The man explained:

"Well, me an' some other mugs has got a hideaway uptown. In a flashy flathouse. We could use a kid like you to play stooge lookout fer us; glom th' drag and th' door fer th' bulls. Get me? All right, there's two finnas a day—seventy a week—in it fer you. You can get some kid clothes, an' yer hair curled, an' one of them kid velocipedes, an' a tin horn, an' a lot more junk like that. An' if th' bulls start t' drift in, you ride up an' down th' hall, an' ring th' bell on th' velocipede, right in front o' th' place where all the names is put up in th' hall, and all them little house phones which hangs on hooks. So's a guy sittin' upstairs close to th' house phone business can hear good an' clear."

"An' if they start lammin' upstairs in th' elevator I might blow like hell on th' horn."

"Ya might blow like hell on th' horn."

"Jake." Tenderly Duffy explored the bruises on his jaw. "How long's it good fer?"

"Maybe a mont'; maybe more. But that ain't got to worry you."

"No, but havin' me hair curled an' wearin' a pair of velvet drawers is. Make it a hun'red a week even, Hot Shot; fifteen a day, an' youse can pay me thirty right now. I ain't never been no actor."

"No." The other was taking three ten dollar bills from a flat wad. "But don't act wrong. You know—" He let the elastic band about the wad snap back with a sharp smack. It had a suggestive sound.

"No," said Duffy, rising, "I ain't ever worked fer fun yet . . . "

DURING the first week or so on that new job, Duffy discovered only a surprisingly small amount of information about the place he worked in and the people he worked for. Riding up and down the red plush carpets among the potted palms in the lobby of the Earl Arms on his new, shiny velocipede or his expensive roller skates, his gaudy tin horn constantly clutched in his hand, he found that the building in itself was rather a semi-respectable place. It seemed to house a few fairly well paid professional ladies and gamblers, a mediocre dentist and a doctor, who occupied the two ground floor apartments, and perhaps one or two other honest citizens.

By degrees he learned that the hideaway for which he was playing lookout was located on the fourth floor, in the rear. It was well situated; it gave on the roof of a courtyard, and on the roof of an extension, also on a fire escape. Its number, in the building, was 4-B. In the slot reserved for it among the others in the lobby, a small and rather expensive card stated that a James B. Evans was the present tenant. Duffy never saw, met or heard of Mr. Evans; from the first he doubted that he existed.

Duffy worked from eight in the morning until eight at night. He slipped in the delivery entrance in the morning, climbed to the top floor and entered a small, unfurnished apartment where he changed his clothing and kept his toys and what he called his "phony". The phony consisted of one of two suits of black velvet, worn over silk sweaters. The pants were cut arbitrarily short, just above the knees, and there was nothing between them and his white, short socks, encased in shiny patent leather slippers.

It was the thought of those pants which Duffy hated. Because of them, he had struck for higher pay from the man named Harry, the young gangster who had hired him. Harry's name was all he knew about the man, except that he liked him, thought him a pretty good guy and a smart gangster, the right guy to run a hideaway, although Duffy knew nothing whatsoever about the other members of the mob who used it.

Harry was the only one of the mob, if such an organization really existed, Duffy ever saw. Harry was his boss, and kept his eye on him. The young and stupid Harlem negro who ran the telephone switchboard in the lobby—and occasionally acted as elevator man when the automatic elevator carried children or old ladies—took Duffy down in the morning, with all his toys, and brought him back at night to the flat on the top floor. The negro was not in the mob, Duffy believed; undoubtedly, though, the man had been paid by Harry to keep his mouth shut and not to evince any surprise at the sudden advent of Duffy.

Duffy remained in the lobby almost throughout the whole day. At noon he went up and ate, alone in his little apartment, the hot meal he always found there. Then he went back again to patrol the lobby until the negro took him up promptly at eight. That was the total of Duffy's facts. At night, he believed, after he had gone, probably regular mobster lookouts were maintained across the street in the cover of the Winter darkness. But about that he was not even certain, or did not really care. The one thing he wanted to do was to get close to or in that apartment on the fourth floor back. As yet, he had never come close to it, and did not see how it would be possible for him to do so.

As those long, strange, but dull days dragged through, he clung stubbornly to his belief that Korcher, the missing public accountant who was the key witness in the city investigation, was somewhere in New York. They were, he told himself savagely, looking for this monkey, Korcher, every place but in New York. Korcher was here; he, Duffy, could swear to it. Yeah, right here, bunked in that hideaway upstairs; probably kidnaped by Kid Bergen's

mob, to be held until after election, when any harm the investigation might make would be wholly belated, and empty.

But prove it! That was the hard part. You could, by pulling the cops into it. They could put the hammer on that joint upstairs and raid it, just on suspicion. But, if he tipped the coppers off, and they pulled it, they would get the ten grand reward offered by the city; he wouldn't.

No, that wasn't so hot. His first plan, the one he had thought out the night he had been fired and had said goodby to the Boss down in the shop, was still the best. He and the Boss would crack the joint and find Korcher. Between them they'd split the ten grand reward. Then the Boss would have a job, and he'd have a job; two good jobs for two good guys. Schleet could even hire them back, paying their price, and make the Boss a managing or a city editor, him head copy boy. And if Schleet didn't, somebody else would. And then—

Duffy smiled; it did not last long. He hadn't figured out any plan that was more than just plain lousy. And here he was, just stalling around.

That was all, or almost all. Twice flatfeet had come into the building. Both of them, coming separately and on different days, stopped at the switchboard and asked low toned questions of the negro seated there. Both times, during their interrogations of the negro, Duffy had rolled on his velocipede right in under the rows of house phones hanging on their hooks, and there blown resounding blasts on his tin horn. But neither detective had moved farther into the building than the switchboard; both had turned, after talking to the negro, and left.

The gangster, Harry, had been waiting for Duffy both those nights when he came up to change and go home. He had described and named the visitors to Harry. Harry had grinned, called him a "fly guy" and handed him a folded five dollar bill before he slipped out the door. But, ruminated Duffy after Harry had gone, he didn't need money —not five dollar bills, anyhow. What he needed was a real break.

Oddly, when that break came, Duffy did not recognize it for long and rather valuable minutes. Perhaps it was because he did not expect it at all in the form in which it presented itself. Anyhow, it came very suddenly. He had been working as a lookout for the man known to him as Harry for three weeks when it happened. It was near four o'clock in the afternoon, and he had been dozing for half an hour over the handle bars of his velocipede in the corner of the lobby when the low black sedan slid to a stop in the gray slush of the gutter outside.

Duffy had come wide awake at once, but had done no more than open his eyes a little bit; he kept the same position. Three men got out of the sedan; first, two together, then a third. One of the two who had got out first went ahead, then the man who had got out last, followed by the third man.

All of them slowed their swift pace for just a moment as they came into the lobby. They wore derby hats and long, close, dark overcoats. They walked with their shoulders slightly stooped and their heads thrust forward just a little bit. Their feet were small, almost feminine in shape and size, and were tightly clasped in shining patent leather topped by white spats.

Coldly, quickly, their eyes took in the morose and inattentive negro behind the switchboard, then Duffy, his velocipede, his litter of toys. They did not speak, or appreciably stop. Without hesitation, they went right on and into the elevator. Its door slammed and Duffy could hear the jerking hiss of compressed air as it started up.

As if just awakening, Duffy slowly wheeled his velocipede down the long lobby and out of the sight of the negro at the switchboard. Then he stood up and looked at the gilt arrow of the elevator indicator; the machine had

stopped at the fourth floor and was now coming down, automatically released.

"Uh, huh," whispered Duffy.

He slid mechanically back on to the seat of the velocipede, rolled along the hall a few feet.

"Hot shots," he said softly, revisioning the swift entrance of the three. "Kid Bergen, in th' natural, an' his two finger men. 'At was Bergen, th' moke in the middle. An' this upstairs is sure more than a hideaway for a lotta cheap hots. T'night I call up th' Boss an' tell 'm. Kid Bergen ain't showed himself in New York in mont's. Huh . . . Yeah, it's a tough life . . . "

AT FIVE minutes of eight the negro transported him and his toys to the top floor and left him at his door. It was dark in the bare, rather cold rooms inside, and he did not turn on the light until he had pushed his cardboard box of toys and his velocipede before him into the place. Then, as he turned the switch on the wall beside the door, he saw the man who stood in the far corner.

It was Harry. And Harry was drunk. Underneath his tight, clear olive skin was a dark flush. His wide lips were wet and glistening in the brilliance of the unmasked overhead light. His small eyes were slightly glazed, blinking in the fumes from the smoldering cigaret he held in one hand, although he made no effort to change the cigaret's position.

"H'lo, kid," he said huskily.

"H'are you, Harry?" Behind him, slowly, Duffy shut the door.

"Lousy!" said Harry. He spoke with violence, repeating the word several times. "Listen," he said. "I'm half soused an' I gotta lam. I gotta job, outa town. The Big Shot pulled in this aft'noon. An' the first he done was turn wise. 'Whos'a kid downstairs?' he asks. I tole him. 'Helluva punk you are,' he says, 't' leave runnin' a dump! Tryin' to rib th' bulls wit' a kid like t'at. Why'nt youse use a real spotter?' "

The smoldering cigaret must have reached Harry's fingers, for he dropped it and cursed. He pushed back his fedora hat with a hand that trembled a little bit:

"But that's a phony baloney, see? A set-up. Because I tole him what youse was good fer, an' what you done, where another guy, a real hot, would 'a' had every bull in town on 's neck. But Ber—th' Big Shot—says, 'Ah, take that hooey off—an' ditch th' kid quick!' "

The cigaret end Harry had dropped was slowly scarring the paint and the floor. He watched the process with no great curiosity. He looked up at Duffy.

"Get me?" he asked—one of his favorite questions.

Duffy nodded.

"Sure. That's all jake wit' me. But don't I get no pay?"

"No, youse get no pay. He dipped all th' wad offa me. An' he's making a play for me doll downstairs, while he sends me on a job outa town—th' rat!" But Harry caught himself then, quite visibly. "Beat it, kid!" he suggested. "Change yer clothes an' scram. If them damn toys here is any good to youse, parcel 'em out wit' ya."

"Them?" asked Duffy, looking at the velocipede and the tin horn. "Nuts!"

Harry managed to grin. He held out his lean white hand.

"Ye're a good kid," he said, "an I'm sorry you was cut outa yer jack. S' long."

"S' long."

The door opened, shut. Harry was gone. But, at the door, Duffy smiled. Slowly he began to undress, untangling his curls with a red celluloid comb he had brought from home, and kicking off his patent leather slippers. But then, as he was stepping out of his velvet pants, he stopped.

"Youse," he told himself, "are a dope. A thick dummy. Can't ya see a break when its pushed to ya on a platter?"

He pulled back on and buttoned the velvet pants. He stepped into the patent leather slippers and made fast their straps. Over his frilled shirt he tugged

in place his worn and patched blue serge jacket, the one he had worn when he had fought with Lips Scuata. He looked around the room once more; he had, he thought, the key for this place still in his pocket. He told himself:

"Bergen's back in town himself, huh? An' Bergen don't trust me, an', more, a hull lot more, he don't trust Harry, although th' guy must 'a' been one o' his best guns, to get th' job in th' first place. Korcher must be bunked downstairs in that dump then. An' Bergen must be figurin' on slidin' Korcher outa town; figures that things is quiet enough now so's he can do it. An', so . . . "

Quietly Duffy stepped out into the hall, shutting and automatically locking the door behind him.

He did not take the elevator down to the fourth floor. He walked down, using the badly lighted and deserted staircase. When he came to the fourth floor he turned to the left, toward the rear of the building, to Apartment 4-B. Before the door bearing those brass letters, he stopped and knocked, softly but repeatedly.

It was opened to him after a time, very suddenly and silently. No one stood in the doorway and, looking in, he could see no one in the vaguely illumined room beyond. But, right inside the door and against the wall, tensed flatly there, was a man with a gun, and that gun was on a line with Duffy's chest and heart. The man with the gun did not speak, and Duffy kept silent, just slowly advancing forward into the room.

The door was kicked shut behind him. It closed with a dull bang. The man who stood by the door, the man with the gun, was not Kid Bergen. Kid Bergen stood by a couch in the corner, near an opened window there. Kid Bergen held a gun in one hand, as did the third man in the room, who also stood by an open window.

"What the hell d' youse want?" It was the man who had shut the door who spoke.

Duffy answered him. But first he looked around the room, noticing the card table, the bottles, the sandwiches and the blond, thin and rather pretty woman who was just now rising up from behind the couch.

"Listen," said Duffy, addressing the man who had addressed him. "Youse ain't gonna cut me outa my pay, are ya?" He spoke quite hesitantly and brokenly, as, he imagined, a boy small enough to wear a pair of sawed-off velvet pants should speak. "All t'at other guy says was scram! An' then he beats it. What ya tryin' to do—what ya think, I—"

The man by the door was laughing at him, but not listening to him; he was watching Kid Bergen. Bergen was advancing into the room from the window he had just shut and curtained. He was in his shirt sleeves. His tie and collar were off, and through the opened neck of his striped silk shirt a clump of thick black hair stood out. He wore a black rubber holster strapped on his left side, and into this he now shoved the pistol he had been carrying in his hand. Kid Bergen, judged Duffy, was just a little bit drunk.

He walked right up to Duffy and looked down at him. Then he reached out one hand and caught the rounded, smooth point of Duffy's jaw in a cruel, wrenching grip. He laughed, making a hoarse, deep sound, which came from far down in his throat.

"Ye're a fresh little punk, ain'tcha?" he asked. "Ye're th' sort a drip like Harry picked fer a spotter. Chees!" Kid Bergen again allowed himself laughter. "An' now youse want pay, huh? Pay. There it is!"

Kid Bergen took his hand from Duffy's chin and pushed him in the face with it. The blow knocked Duffy down. He stayed down. He cried. He had not cried since he was four years old, the day they had buried his father; he imagined now that he was doing a pretty good job of it. Kid Bergen advanced and stood right above him,

looking down at him.

"A punk like youse," he told Duffy, "bustin' in here, askin' fer pay! Ya got it. Ya like it? Well, maybe youse need a little more, an' youse'll ferget yer pay, an' t'at youse ever seen this dump, er me, er Harry, er nobody! What ya tryin' t' do—muscle in?"

Kid Bergen seemed to tire suddenly of rhetoric; he lifted one foot and drew it back to kick. The thin young woman stopped him. She pushed him back with a sort of frantic energy. She cursed him out of a vocabulary which Duffy recognized was excellent in its breadth. She ended:

"Ain't you done enough, Kid? Come out of it! Snap to! Ye're a little soused. Leave the poor rat be; he ain't done you no harm. It ain't his fault; if it's anybody's, it's Harry's. Let th' kid be!"

"Yeah?" Kid Bergen stared at her, then slapped her.

Instantly she slapped him back. They stood smiling at each other. Kid Bergen looked down at Duffy.

"Ya hear what th' moll said?" he asked. "Well, she's a smart moll; get up."

Duffy got up slowly. He wiped the tears from the end of his nose. He looked at the girl, remembering Harry and what Harry had said, and then at Kid Bergen.

"Maybe," he asked, his eyes lifting hesitantly, "youse'd let me have me dough if I was t' run some errands fer you. Maybe a coupla bucks of it. Youse need any ginger ale, any butts, er cards, er newspapers?"

For just one very brief fraction of a second the blonde's eyes narrowed and flickered as they rested on Duffy's eyes.

"There," she said, going so far as to put a hand on Duffy's head and pat it. "See? Ain't he the good kid, though? Sure. Here. Bring up four bottles of seltzer an' four bottles o' ginger. Them big bottles. An' two packs o' them Russian cigarets—Samovars." From the top of one ash colored stocking she took a five-dollar bill and handed it to Duffy.

"Beat it now. Maybe youse'd better have yer supper while ye're out. Shoot what's left in the piece; we won't want them things fer an hour or so. Scram down th' back way an' through the alley; don't let that elevator man in the lobby see ya. And rap four times when ya get back. Huh, kid? O.K. Scram, redhead!"

"T'anks, lady," said Duffy, folding up the warm bill.

As he backed toward the door he did his best to blush.

THE Boss met Duffy in the drugstore on the corner about twenty minutes later.

"Spill it," said the Boss softly, sitting down on a stool beside Duffy at the counter.

"Yeah," said Duffy around the corner of the three-decker club sandwich he was eating. "Order yerself somethin' first, though. Somethin' toasted that'll take a long time t' make."

The Boss did. Duffy licked away the last of the mayonnaise on his fingers along the velvet pants.

"Youse bring a gat?" he whispered.

"The Colt I had in the Army."

"Jake. Now, listen . . ."

He told his story very swiftly. He ended:

"Korcher's up there locked in a bedroom. I hearn him buttin' up against th' door an' tryin' t' hear what was bein' said outside, when I was there doin' me act. There's two bedrooms, one shut, an' locked, th' other open. I seen th' doll an' Bergen look quick two er three times at that door when I was there. And th' doll tipped me th' eye. She's playin' down our alley; Harry was her boy friend, an' it's th' heat fer Harry, no matter where he goes. Bergen wants 'at frail. So that makes two hots in th' flat, an' Bergen. Now, here's what we do."

He told the Boss while he ate.

"O.K?"

"Right."

"Take it on the hoof, then, aroun' th'

block, an' come up the other way. Stay close inta th' wall, so's a guy in the flat-house couldn't see youse from a winda. Then, when ye're in th' service door, walk upstairs an' wait there fer me; I'll come in th' elevator."

The Boss made no audible answer; he paid his bill, stood up and left. Duffy followed him five or six minutes later, scrupulously carrying the four bottles of seltzer, the four large bottles of ginger ale and the two boxes of Samovar cigarets.

It was a heavy load; the counterman in the drugstore had divided it into two separate parcels for him. Duffy was carrying one under each arm when he got out of the elevator on the fourth floor of the Earl Arms and started down the hall toward apartment 4-B. The staircase door opened silently and the Boss stepped out. A small, pleasant smile was on the Boss's face; his felt hat was pushed back from his forehead, in the same way he used to push back his eye-shade in the shop. His right hand was far down in the jacket pocket on that side; the pocket jutted out with the pressure of the flat Colt muzzle against it. The Boss fell in behind Duffy. They approached the door of 4-B.

The Boss stood to the left of the door, Duffy to the right of it, without sound. The Boss stood back from the door perhaps three or four paces, and hard against the wall, the big, blue steel automatic out now, and in his hand.

Duffy hefted the two bulky parcels farther up against his chest and knocked softly on the panels of the door, just as he had been ordered to knock by the blonde. When it opened a little, he said softly—

"It's me, th' kid—"

The door opened, almost halfway. Duffy could see the man who stood in it, one of Bergen's mobsters, the bigger, thinner man, and the gun that man held in his left hand. Behind, and just fleetingly, Duffy could also see the couch across the room; on it were Bergen and the blonde. And the blonde's arms were about Bergen's neck and across Bergen's arms.

"Give me a hand, will ya?" said Duffy to the man in the half open door. "These damn bundles is heavy." One of them, the one containing the four seltzer bottles, slipped and fell from his crooked arm as he spoke. It hit with a dully clanking and loud noise. "Aw, chees!" said Duffy, making a reach for it and missing by inches.

The other bundle tottered in his grasp as he did so, and fell. He clutched at the neck of one big ginger ale bottle and succeeded in retaining that as the others banged down.

The eyes of the mobster in the doorway became fine, dark, little pinpoints of hate. He cursed Duffy liquidly in Sicilian. He shoved his gun down into the waistband of his trousers, shunted back the door with his shoulder, advanced a bit and reached down for the bottles.

Then Duffy hit him, right across the neck and the base of the brain, with the bottle he held. He jumped back as he struck, to let the Boss by. The Boss came fast. He jumped right into the room, hurdling the kicking form of Duffy's victim. The Boss's gun was down hard against his thigh, but he did not have to fire it. On the couch Kid Bergen was madly striking and cursing at the blonde; she had just flipped his automatic from its rubber holster and tossed it across the room, right at the Boss's feet. The other mobster in the room had been slumped over the littered card table, half drunk and half asleep. He sat up in time to get the barrel of the Boss's gun across his closely shaven skull and then to sit back, grunting faintly, his own weapon sliding to the carpet.

Kid Bergen was strangling the blonde when the Boss got there; he beat up Bergen quite badly. Duffy heard more of that than he saw; he was busy plucking up the gun from his own victim, still sprawled loosely in the door-

way. Then, the gun in his hand, Duffy sprang for the nearest bedroom door and flung it back. There was no one in it. He turned toward the Boss.

"T'row us th' key, Boss. Youse'll find it on Bergen."

The Boss threw it to him. Duffy dropped his gun into his jacket pocket.

"Hey, Korcher!" he yelled as he stooped, working at the big, complicated lock. "Youse there?" A dim and frantic shout answered him from inside. "Youse Michael Korcher?" He nodded, turning the key and knob. "All right; save yer wind. I hearn ya th' first time. Boy, youse'll sure be a *public* accountant now!"

The girl had gone first, shaking Duffy and the Boss by the hand, and taking all the money and jewelry in the flat; then the cops had come and gone, taking Mr. Korcher, Kid Bergen and his two equally noncombatant allies. The Boss had just got through at the telephone, talking to the office, and to Mr. Schleet in person, giving him, first, the ultimatum he and Duffy had drawn up swiftly, then a terse stop-gap flash on the story, which would hold the paper until the Boss and Duffy got there.

Only a uniformed man stood dozing by the door outside and a precinct detective sat sleeping openly inside. The rest had all gone, and were history. The Boss phrased it aloud that way.

Duffy nodded.

"Come on; we go. That hack is waitin' fer us. You got maybe seven columns to write before they can send th' second edition upstairs tonight."

"I know it," admitted the Boss. A fleeting look of sorrow passed over his lean face. "I guess, now, I'll never finish that book I started.

"Nope." Duffy stood aside at the door to let him pass through first. "I guess youse won't." They walked down the hall to the elevator in silence. Once, as they stood there waiting for the rising elevator, Duffy looked gravely at the Boss.

"It's a tough life we got," he said.

Sea Home

By SEYMOUR G. LINK

I'D RATHER be blind and deaf than to be
Far from the sight and the sound of the sea.
I'd rather be voiceless than not to be telling
The way of a ship when the sea is swelling.

Oh, never to watch against the sky
Another ship go plunging by,
Nor chanty it up with the bowlines taut . . .
Were enough to rob a man of thought.

I'd just as soon be lifeless clay
As never to know the stinging spray
Of lifting seas when the wind is strong
And the mainsheet's pulling the ship along.

I'd rather be down with Davy Jones
Feeling the sea about my bones,
Than live behind a tight locked door
Where nothing on earth could move the floor!

A Humorous Story of the World War

GARLIC

By ROLAND DORGELÈS

SHORT, skinny, all hair, an olive hued skin and flashing eyes, he was really an odd fellow. At first glance, because of his pointed beard, one might judge him a swashbuckler, but on a second meeting, one noticed only a wart planted on his cheek like a tuft of horsehair. War-like from a distance, pacific at close range, he resembled a musketeer become a prune merchant. Add to that a Toulouse accent such as is seldom heard and his name of Roufignac—Clove of Garlic—which seemed made to fit him. From the day of his arrival he was called Garlic.

He came to the regiment to replace our former colonel, who had been

wounded, just when the three battalions wondered whether anything might be gained by a change in leaders. For the occasion the officers had decided to have a review, with the presentation of the flag and perhaps a speech or two; but he spoiled all that by dropping in like a bomb, without any one's being warned, not even the captain-adjutant, and thus had the pleasure of catching us unprepared.

As the scribes worked without haste, filling out useless blanks, smoking comfortably, a little man, quick as a cat, entered the kitchen used as an office, crossed it like a whirlwind and, guided by a bewildered noncommissioned officer, leaped up the steep stairway leading to the first floor. The orderly barely had time to shout attention before he passed.

All looked about uneasily, each fearing that he had not put out his cigaret in time. Their perturbation was so great that none could tell what the new colonel looked like; they argued in low voices as to whether or not he wore a beard. And no one volunteered to find out.

The noncom reappeared within a few moments.

"Delormel!" he cried, rolling startled eyes. "The colonel wants a liaison man. Get up there quickly."

The man indicated grimaced wryly; the choice did not flatter him. Nervously he smoothed his coat, adjusted his belt, made sure that his puttees were rolled neatly; and, with his throat somewhat contracted, he went up to the large room, which had been cleaned carefully.

"I hope the flies did not soil the mirror," he mused anxiously, as he took the steps four at a time.

He made a perfect entrance, clicked his heels smartly and stood inside the doorway rigid as a stake. The colonel stood by the fireplace, just tall enough to rest an elbow on the mantel. Delormel, at attention, watched him with that steady, inexpressive glance that regulations impose upon troopers. What he sought to read on his chief's face was only the effect he himself produced. And those bushy brows did not seem of good omen.

"Good appearance," the colonel said nevertheless.

He did not swerve his eyes from the liaison man. Indeed, he appeared to pluck him apart, to weigh him as if he had desired to buy him. Then he came to a decision, suddenly extended one arm and ordered—

"Forward—march!"

Startled, the liaison runner looked at him, and lost a point by asking in a stammering voice—

"March where, Colonel?"

The terrible eyes grew dark with anger, and the officer spoke in such a shrill voice that all the scribes trembled in the room below.

"Before you!" he cried, loud enough to burst his lungs. "I order you to march!"

Bewildered, Delormel started with the left foot, ready for anything, merely wondering in his dismay whether he should stop when he reached the wall or smash against it. But at the fatal moment an order saved him.

"Halt!"

Delormel stopped short, hands on the seam of his trousers, glance fifteen paces ahead. This time he won approval.

"Right—face," the colonel ordered, still shrilly.

The unfortunate soldier pivoted automatically. He no longer thought; he obeyed. Had he been ordered to drill until dinner time, reciting regulations at the same time, he would have done so without protest.

"I'm in for it," he decided mentally. "He's a madman, and I'm picked to try him out."

But the colonel did not appear angry. On the contrary, his face relaxed and he nodded approvingly.

"You march well," he said in a gentle voice. "Liaison men have a bad tendency to forget the true qualities of the

trooper. I am happy to note that it is not the case in the regiment which I am to command. At ease."

Relieved, the runner stood naturally, his chest deflated, heels apart. He looked at his master with a sort of gratitude—a candidate who had passed his tests.

"What's your name?" the colonel asked, pulling his beard.

The liaison man, no longer nervous, answered in a clear voice—

"Delormel, Colonel."

Again the face changed, the brows lowered.

"De Lormel—" he asked in a harsh voice—"with a particle?"

"In one word, Colonel," the runner cleared himself instantly.

"Good," Roufignac said with a sigh. "You see, I do not believe in nobility, and I do not want my liaison service to seem a refuge for well born lads. Men are all equal; that's my motto." Then he repeated the name of the runner, articulating the syllables—De-lor-mel—with care, to etch them on his memory, and explained amiably:

"If I ask for your name, it is not vain curiosity on my part. It is through respect, you understand? The soldier respects his chief, the chief respects the soldier. That makes the strength of the regiment. I do not want, when I meet one of my troopers on the street, to call him by yelling, 'Eh, private!' No. That isn't proper. I want to know all my men by name, and thus to prove that they are more than a number to me. Now that I know your name, I shall never forget it. You may go, Deschanel!"

For a start, the newcomer had done things very well, and the story spread throughout the regiment, taken from kitchen to kitchen by the supply parties.

That very night the colonel might have boasted that he was known to the entire outfit, but it was not until the next morning that he started to give his full measure.

TO BEGIN with, he was up at dawn and trotting to the rolling kitchens to taste the coffee.

"Excellent," he said at the first. "Not drinkable," he reproached the next.

Thus distributing blame and praise in turn, he drank a cup at each company, taking time to give instruction to the cooks on the manufacture of coffee. Then, when he had finished his inspection, he went to the stables to pick out a mount for himself. The captain-adjutant, who had caught up with him, not without some effort, informed him that his predecessor had left his horse behind, and that no better animal existed in the whole brigade. To no purpose; Roufignac would listen to nothing of the kind.

"Know all about it," he interrupted with a sweeping gesture. "Come from family of breeders; was reared in stud stable. Won all the steeplechases in the Southwest. What I want is a Tarbais horse!"

He had all the nags of the regiment trotted out before him, even brewers' mares picked up in Flanders during the retreat from Charleroi, and he finally selected a beast that was hairy as a goat, with round pasterns and the jaws of a camel. A Tarbais horse? That is doubtful, but that was the mount the colonel was perched on at one o'clock in the afternoon when he appeared before the assembled battalions.

To make the story amusing, one might relate that he arrived limping, with his nag tired out. No, one must be just. Having started to gallop from the village, he left behind all his officers, leaped his beast over a hedge, slid down an embankment and emerged before the flag, beating his followers by ten good lengths. Nevertheless, the captain-adjutant was not dazzled by the performance.

"I understand now," he chaffed bitterly. "He picked a circus horse to spot obstacles for him. But if he tries it again, he'll surely kill himself." It was

not spite that caused Captain Baron de la Torre to speak thus.

To cap all else, Roufignac was nearsighted. Nearsighted or absentminded, no one could be sure which, but the certain thing is that he did not see well.

"Where are the machine gunners? I want to see my machine gunners!" he yelped, propped on his stirrups, while the two companies halted before him waiting silently for him to notice the cleanliness of the weapons and the excellent health of the mules.

The review was not over before our opinion was complete: That man was as incapable of finding his way across country as a quail through the Paris Boulevards. If he directed the regiment when we next went to the trenches, the Lord alone knew where he would take us. Nevertheless, as he wished to hide that infirmity, he decided, when we had filed before him, to lead the regiment back to the village in person. Without hesitation he headed for a clump of linden trees and, followed by the band, passed down the lane to the cemetery, which he had mistaken for the national road.

It was thought at first that this would lead to a pious ceremony, and the bandmaster delicately ordered the "Funeral March" to be played. But the captain-adjutant, understanding what was happening, galloped down the column, howling for us to halt, stopped the buglers, drove back the first sections, and this led to a jam such as had not been beheld since the days of the retreat from Belgium. All this was to the tuneful strains of Chopin's famous march.

"No kidding, he starts off strong," growled the worried troopers.

To lead his battalions to the cemetery on the day of his arrival indicated excessive impatience, and those who were superstitious might well knock on wood. But we were far behind the lines, and all were reassured rapidly; and when the order was given to disperse, unanimous laughter shook the twelve companies—fourteen companies, including those of the overlooked machine gunners.

Roufignac, alias Garlic, had won popularity at once.

THE task of the historian is difficult. As the actions of illustrious men always are out of the ordinary and take place on a fabulous plane, one risks, when relating them, being greeted with unbelief. One sways constantly between the desire to be truthful and the craving to be believed. The deeds of Garlic, related without a change, will be deemed an exaggeration. To temper them would be to betray truth.

At the risk of being called a liar, the tale of the flag must be related as it happened.

Our Roufignac had learned, on the day of the review, that the flag of the regiment was a sort of relic, which held within its folds glorious memories of Sebastopol and Solferino. That flag becoming his own, he decided to admire it.

"Come and present it to me in my office," he ordered the sergeant secretary, for the flag-bearer, a sublieutenant, was away on leave. Then, to show that he did not react to mere caprice, he added in a grave voice, "Have the color guard along."

Then he went upstairs to put on his dress uniform. And a few minutes later the squad climbed the stairs, boots tramping clumsily on the narrow steps. When the first man pushed open the door he saw the colonel at his favorite place near the fireplace. He wore his steel helmet and full field equipment.

"Attention!" Roufignac shouted, straightening every inch of his small stature.

They rushed on either side of the flag, flanking the puzzled sergeant. The shrill voice resumed—

"Fix—bayonets! Present—arms!"

The four men obeyed dully. As the ceiling was low, they could not straighten their rifles, and held them slanting forward as if they were charging. For

a long moment Roufignac was motionless, saluting the colors. Then, interested, perhaps moved, he came nearer the emblem.

"It's torn," he said in a gentle voice, "torn by bullets."

The sergeant thought it his duty to explain.

"No, Colonel. That's wear."

Had Roufignac been slapped he would not have leaped quicker.

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed. "You mean that these holes—"

"Yes, Colonel," the sergeant stammered, already regretting his sincerity, but feeling it was too late to withdraw. "All the officers who were with the regiment before will tell you the same thing. That flag is almost a hundred years old. There were moths."

Roufignac's face reddened so much that the four men of the color guard thought he was about to have a stroke.

"A motheaten flag!" he burst out at last. "Do they think I shall seek victory with a motheaten flag? All right! Send for the tailor."

The tailor was brought within a minute. He was a married man who feared for his job and hoped that he would go through the war without injury save needle pricks in his fingertips. The raging greeting of the colonel deprived him of the small amount of self-confidence he possessed.

"What do you mean, you don't understand? Are you deaf? I am telling you the flag must be mended. Is that clear? Mended, you understand, mended!"

The sergeant and the four soldiers looked at one another with dread. It seemed to them that they were beholding something insanely extravagant. The tailor's knees shook, and he wondered whether he would not be executed for the sacrilege. But Roufignac was far from understanding their perturbation. On the contrary, he was certain that by mending the relic he became the Providence of the regiment.

"Fancy work, eh?" he suggested, feeling the cloth. "With silk thread, and gold for the letters."

Alas, his will was done, and within a few days the flag of Solferino was so well mended that one might have believed it bought in a department store.

To say that the regiment as a whole was upset would be an exaggeration. The flag had been carried in the secretaries' baggage during the campaign, rolled in an oilcloth, and no one thought that a tear more or less affected his individual honor. But there was some emotion, particularly among the officers; and the captain-adjutant took the lead and shouted, without dissimulation, that it was a profanation.

"Ah!" grumbled Roufignac. "There's a fellow who thinks he'll impose on me with his baron's crown and his long old family name. Well, we'll have some fun!"

From that day they did not speak outside duty, and life became a burden to the unlucky scribes in the office. Not only were they bombarded with contradictory orders, but they had to remain neutral in that war waged between the two chiefs with cutting words and innuendos. Roufignac never called the adjutant anything save the Marquis of Something, and the latter, scornful and clever, ordered the sentries, six times a day, to assist the colonel when he returned to quarters—to hold his horse, to open doors for him, to place chairs out of his path, "to avoid an accident due to his bad eyes."

The nearsightedness of Garlic had become legendary since the day when he had whistled for a halt to fill the canteens before a wayside shrine which he had mistaken for a fountain. There were a hundred mistakes of the same type, the majority sheer inventions, some of the men claiming that he had sent the rolling kitchens up to the trenches because he thought them trench-mortars; others insisted they had seen him call a major on the street and bruskly order him to sweep up horse manure.

DESPITE appearances, it was never ascertained that Roufignac was nearsighted. A nearsighted man does not stop privates in the street to inform them that they are not wearing a necktie; nor can he spot, at night, a smart guy who tries to get away to fish in the pool. Many doubted the colonel's affliction.

"He sees as well as you or me, don't make any mistake about it," protested those he had stopped.

And the regiment was soon split into two clans—one holding that Roufignac was nearsighted as a mole, the other claiming it was only a trick to catch people by surprise. The officers held out that he was nearsighted; but when the medical major suggested that the colonel wear glasses he was rewarded with an explosion of rage that was heard all over the place.

"I do not knit, sir!" the outraged colonel howled. "I fight!"

The better to be understood, he lunged out as if he held a rapier at the end of his nervous arm. All in all, Delormel's first opinion was perhaps the right one—it was perhaps a madman they had sent us.

Not a mean madman, however. No superior officer ever cared more for his men. Sometimes during the night he would enter the room where the liaison runners slept and awaken one at random.

"What time did you retire?"

"Midnight, Colonel," the chap would answer, blinking.

"It's four o'clock. You haven't slept long enough. Sleep on. I want you to get your rest."

But the next man, retired at ten o'clock, had to get up.

"Awake! You'll thicken your blood by sleeping so long! Put your shoes on and go and ask the heavy artillery whether there's anything new to report."

After which, his conscience at rest, Roufignac would go up to his office and get to work, unless he walked about barefoot in the grass, singing songs of his native land in a falsetto.

As he slept very little, he had all night to elaborate projects, and often he would send for his secretary at one in the morning to take dictation concerning a new schedule for showers, or the best method to be employed in destroying rats. Fortunately, he had forgotten about it by morning, usually because an even more magnificent idea had chased away the first. He paid special attention to questions of health. Unexpectedly, he would enter the barracks.

"What is that smell?" he would ask, sniffing. "Come on, hep! That straw must be changed."

"But, Colonel, we put it there when we came, only eight days ago."

"That doesn't matter; it's fermenting. Fresh straw and thick soup are what make crack troops."

There was nothing to be done save obey. Our needs for straw reached such extraordinary quantities that the supply department asked us what we were doing with it.

"Tell them that I eat it," Roufignac replied to the secretary.

When that devilish man had reached a conclusion, it was useless to argue against him. He would have fought wind and tide. Thus, he decided that our quarters should be the cleanest along the Front, and to achieve this goal he took harsh measures, handling the civilians like a conquered people.

"War on dirt!" he shouted to the frightened peasants in the streets.

They moaned, they protested, they threatened to report him; but nevertheless he had the handsome heaps of manure spreading before the gates of their farms taken away. He posted up an order forbidding the population to leave about "anything dirty or evil smelling", which might be interpreted in many ways. As soon as he saw a suspicious looking pile, Roufignac would leap toward it, taking the nearest bystander as a witness.

"Is that dirt?"

He would ask that pointblank before a barrel of flour or before a heap of

coal or peat, and the unlucky soldier selected as a witness would stare, trying to think of what answer to make to avoid punishment. Soon it became a joke with the whole regiment, and men greeted each other with, "Is that dirt?" instead of, "How are you?"

Not content with attending to sleeping quarters, Garlic wished to better the kitchens, and this time his orders fell like a bolt from the blue.

"All cooks whose cooking is not good shall be sent back into the ranks."

At this threat, a touching emulation swept the cookies, frightened away from the ranks by the terrific losses suffered in the latest attacks. Never did the regiment eat so much fried potatoes as during that time. At dawn one could see the luckless cooks peeling potatoes near their rolling stoves, and when the rest still slept soundly they were preparing meals for the day. No one knows how many new ways of cooking macaroni were thus discovered! And what culinary genius came into play to make us eat that government bacon we no longer could eat! When they drew breath, their dishes ready, the colonel would appear, followed by his faithful Delormel carrying a mess kit.

"Serve me a ration!"

Under the eyes of the frightened pan juggler, he would eat slowly, licking the sauce, smelling the pieces of meat to make the torture last longer. As instructions from general headquarters and articles in the *Army Reviews* ceaselessly reminded troopers that rice was a splendid food, he swore that he would make us love it.

Upon his order, it was prepared in every way possible, with grease and without, with sugar and with pork, and it was still the same pasty stuff. Not a few, to please the palate of the Gascon, would have liked to add a clove of garlic or so, but they feared that he would see an allusion to his origin in this, and restrained themselves to handfuls of onions, which yield less savor. Visibly, the colonel was losing patience.

"I shall find the right man!" he would cry angrily, tossing the mess kit aside.

THE right man? One day the colonel found the man for whom he had been clamoring to the four winds. He was passing the Seventh Company in review when he espied a negro. To tell the truth, that son of the jungle had first seen the light of day in Cabourg, the son of a Martinique maid and of a lifesaver; but despite the mixture he was superbly black. Discovering him, Roufignac uttered a yelp of triumph.

"I have him, I have him! Come here, my lad. You're a negro?"

The other did not deny the evidence.

"Yes, Colonel."

"In your country people like rice. They eat a lot of it."

"Every day, my Colonel," the ebony hued Norman said, scenting a soft snap, remembering by a miracle the speech of his ancestors. "Him much like 'um. Him eat 'um much."

"Know how to cook it?"

"Cook 'um all ways, Colonel."

Roufignac asked for no more. The next moment the unlucky cook was sent back to the ranks, while the negro from Cabourg took charge of the rolling kitchen. The next day at meal time the colonel came before any one else to taste his favorite rice. He said it was excellent.

"Didn't I tell you?" He turned with a victorious grin to the company commander, who was cautious and merely smelled the food. "What's needed in the army is every one in his right place, from the top to the bottom of the ladder."

After this public approval there was nothing save acceptance possible, and the negro, promoted to the rank of "right man", had the right to serve his comrades with fearful messes. If they did not like it, they could go to bed without eating.

"The colonel likes it!" he would say to those who complained.

Therefore, for weeks afterward, we admired—along the road or on the parapet of the trench—little sticky heaps planted like milestones. They were the rice rations of the Seventh Company, thrown away by soldiers who refused to taste it. Such incidents did not help Roufignac's reputation. And to have civilians, officers and cooks against one is quite a lot for a start. But the colonel noticed nothing; on the contrary, he believed himself popular. At least, with the troopers.

"Hep! Hep!" he would shout from afar when he saw a soldier. "Your name is Rigaud, isn't it?"

"No, Colonel. It is Guyon."

"Oh, yes! That's it—Guyot! Well, my lad, you should not believe that war consists in running like a hare at the sight of a superior officer. A chief is not an enemy, he's a protector! Repeat that to me."

The soldier, petrified, would utter in a strangled voice—

"A chief is not an enemy—he's a protector!"

Then, having saluted, about-faced, he would join his friends, who were usually bursting with laughter at the nearest corner.

Soon it became impossible for Roufignac to find a soldier. As he came near, the cafés emptied, the streets became deserted, and sick men, exempt from duty, were seen to hide in the straw when he walked toward their barracks. Those little examinations he conducted in public, twisting his mustache, were a cause for fear. He asked questions which puzzled the boldest.

"Are you glad to be fighting?" he asked the unfortunate private who allowed himself to be caught.

The other remained inert, breathless, thinking—

"If I tell him yes, he'll think I'm kidding him."

Therefore, he would smile stupidly, stammer something vague at random. Luckily, Roufignac did not like to punish his men, and one was quit, as a rule, with a lesson in patriotism given in the middle of the road.

"Everything for the Motherland, my lad. Everything! Everything! And even more!"

Those apothegms, which were like charades, flitted from lips to lips, constantly renewed and modified, and it was said that the captain-adjutant told them at mess to make other officers laugh. For if the colonel had little prestige before the troopers, he had even less in the eyes of his staff.

Sure that he would not remain long at the head of his regiment, his subordinates made no effort to gain his favor, and all disregarded his orders or worked against them underhandedly. The colonel had sensed this, and kept his eyes open.

"He laughs best who laughs last," he would say to the lieutenant in charge of the telephone service, who was his confidant. "Let's wait until we reach the trenches and you'll see whether I'll fix them or not!"

For the time being, he was content to spoil their leisure by ordering marches, reviews and drills, although in the end it was the private who suffered most. He himself preached by example; he was not afraid of doing a march on foot to cheer up the stragglers, or of throwing grenades on the drill field, to stir them with emulation. His preference went to the bayonet, however. He pretended that that type of fencing was the healthiest of all drills, and he readily took a rifle to demonstrate.

"Right face!" he would scream. "Left face! Parry! Thrust!"

He leaped about like a kid, stabbed on all sides, traced a circle of terror all about him, and one always wondered by what miracle he avoided knocking men's eyes out.

During the long marches he showed us odd kindnesses, had cider delivered to us by the supply service, saying our army corps was from Normandy and used to that drink; or he would buy from a passing van three hundred spice

buns which he would toss to us like candies thrown at a baptism. There was one thing he would not tolerate—our eating fruits, particularly those still green plums of which the orchards were full. When he spotted men plucking them from the trees, or peasants handing them out by the basketful because they had no pigs to fatten, he would go into terrible rages.

"They'll give me an epidemic of dysentery, those fellows!" he complained to the major.

YES, he watched us with care. So that one day when he was following the regiment, mounted on his hairy steed, he noticed a score of men leaving the ranks, crowding at the gate of a convent. Two nuns had come out with a basket filled with holy medals and were distributing them into outstretched hands. At this spectacle Roufignac's blood boiled. He spurred his horse.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop!"

The soldiers hesitated. The nuns' eyes opened with surprise. But the pious distribution was resumed.

"Don't take any!" the colonel howled from the saddle of his rearing horse. "Don't take any! They give you colic!"

Nothing could express the bewilderment of the soldiers and of the saintly nuns when they heard such an incongruous warning. This time he had overstepped the limit. Some deemed him irresponsible; others whispered that he was a freethinker; and the chaplain, wounded in his faith, complained to general headquarters.

"Well, it'll be nice to go up to the lines with that bird!" the officers moaned once more.

For three weeks, while we had been resting at the rear, they had shrugged, but now that the time came when we would go back to the trenches, in a sector we did not know, they started to fret. On the other hand, Roufignac was overjoyed. The hour of vengeance had struck, and he would show them all what he could do at genuine fighting.

"By the ears—I'll drag them on patrol by the ears!" he chuckled, looking sidewise at the Marquis of Something.

He wished his physical side to equal his moral side for that grand occasion, and this was the sole fear clouding his happiness; he feared that he would seem old, would show his age. After several sleepless nights he came to a decision.

"Deschanel," he addressed Delormel solemnly, "today I am not speaking to the subordinate, but to the man. And I appeal to the man's discretion."

The liaison runner, who for some time since had stopped wondering at anything, assumed the air of Aymerillot before Charlemagne.

"I promise you, Colonel!"

"Thanks—well, you'll go to the city, pretending to take a message to divisional headquarters, and you'll buy for me a bottle of good black dye. A good brand, eh? Don't worry about the price. For some months mental problems even more than physical fatigue have whitened your colonel, and I don't want a regiment of brave young men to appear commanded by a graybeard. Go, my friend."

The faithful Delormel leaped on his bicycle, and by dinner time he brought back, secretly, the mysterious bottle.

"That's good," the colonel approved. "We'll apply that tonight."

He must have spent hours dyeing his hair, for the lamp did not go out during the night in that room on the first floor. Only, because the dye was poor or Roufignac had not read the instructions carefully, the next morning, when he entered the office, he was no longer brown—he was purple. Not a brilliant purple, to be sure, but a pretty violet that was rather dark, like the skin of an eggplant, and that gave him a supernatural appearance which his runners contemplated with a sort of terror. By a miracle, he did not seem to notice it himself, and when he passed before Delormel he winked his eye meaningly.

"How do I look?" he asked the tele-

phone lieutenant, who stared at him and gaped. "I feel all pepped up!"

Until the last moment he was in charming humor. He ordered reviews and parades for the sole pleasure of promising us all crosses, medals and promotion if we accomplished the deeds expected of us.

"He must have eaten lion meat," moaned the soldiers, who had learned to distrust heroic enterprises.

Luckily, the divisional depot had announced the arrival of replacements, and the majors had persuaded our Bluebeard that his duty was to remain behind to greet the recruits. Thus we were spared going into the trenches under his orders. That was a clear profit.

For several days we heard of him only through the men who brought up our food. They related that he was harassing the helpless recruits with drills of his own invention, that he had made them cross the village crawling on their bellies, under the interested gaze of the civilian population. But as these yarns came from the kitchens we did not wholly believe them.

ONE night a fatigue party in the communication trenches of the second line heard the sound of marching troopers. Its members slid into holes to cede the path. The column approached, slowly, prudently, muffling the noises of steps and weapons.

"What is it?" the question was passed along.

No one understood why so many precautions were taken thus far from the Front. But astonishment increased when a sergeant-major was seen rounding an angle, stooped, head sunk between his shoulders. In the voice of a stage conspirator he replied—

"Silence."

He certainly was not used to the Front.

"You can look up," some one called out. "The Boches aren't mean around here."

The men following him also appeared to be walking on eggs, and shuffled silently.

"Say, there," the same voice resumed, "do you think there's a war going on?"

At last a soldier noticed their clean greatcoats, the helmets without scratches, and it was enough for him to yell, "Look at them! Ain't they pretty?" for all to understand. It was the legendary reenforcement company that Roufignac was sending to the lines to receive the baptism of fire. At once everybody was out of the holes, crowding near them.

"Where are the trenches?" asked the sergeant.

He was informed that the Front was still a long way ahead, that liaison men were doubtless waiting forward to guide him when danger started.

"I feared an ambush," he admitted, indicating the camouflage along the path.

So much innocence disarmed the veterans. The recruits, reassured now, looked at the rockets flaring ahead and stretched their ears to listen to the flute-like sounds streaking the night.

"That's nothing," said a soldier. "Only bullets."

They were not frightened. One even started to laugh. Many times we had seen innocent men led up to the row without being prepared for what they would find, but never did a reenforcement draft go up to the Front with such ignorance as this one. I don't know how Roufignac had represented war to these recruits, or what they had been taught in training camp, but the truth is that they were coming with wood piled on their knapsacks "to heat the coffee" and little brooms "to sweep out the dugouts." No one could believe his ears.

"Well, try to light a fire in a corner where I am," a corporal said angrily, "and see whether or not I'll caress your bottoms with the hobnails of my size eleven!"

The poor fellows had not expected such a greeting from the veterans. But

they were not at the end of their troubles. When they reached the communication trenches of the first line they found no liaison men to guide them, as the colonel had advised no one of their coming. They turned about, tramped back and forth all night long, making as much noise as a wedding party, to show they were not scared. At dawn they piled into an empty trench and slept almost one on the other, while their chief, a sublieutenant without a mustache, ran from one post to another, boldly asking for his "combat emplacement."

Such candor would have melted stones, but as it was a chance to get Roufignac into trouble, no company commander would take in that wandering troop, and the recruits continued their aimless tramping, from the front to the rear, finding no shelters to sleep in, and never knowing whether they'd eat on the next day.

The arrival of the colonel, who had followed them, did not bring about order. Scarcely installed in his P.C, he wished to direct operations, and he upset everything. He ordered the companies in the first line not to send back men for food, the machine gunners to sleep nowhere save near their guns. He also forbade giving the gas alarm noisily.

"Are we presumed to give the Boches the exact range?" he raved like a madman. "With all that noise, they know when they're hitting the mark! Softly, I'm telling you, softly!"

The result of all these wise orders soon was manifest. To start with, the fatigue parties sent up from the second lines with food lost their way in the communication trenches each night. Then punishments started to rain.

"Into your dugouts!" the machine gun captain would order his men. "I don't want you all wiped out by a single shell!"

"Outside!" the colonel would vociferate, when he found a firer or a loader anywhere save near the gun. "Your position is near your machine gun."

No one knew which to obey.

As Roufignac felt that his orders were interfered with, he wished to assure himself that they were carried out, and no longer left the front lines. That made matters worse. When he ordered the gong-men to sound the alarm softly the major would come along and order the contrary.

"If I don't hear that alarm from my dugout, I hand you fifteen days' prison and strike you off the list for leave."

It was no longer ahead that danger was, but behind. Even in the trench, supreme refuge when shells were not falling, men trembled over service matters.

"Look out! Here comes the colonel."

Some felt like leaping over the parapet to duck him. Even then, it would not have been safe, for Roufignac, who was afraid of nothing, was quite capable of following any one into the barbed wire. He worried no more about shells than if they had been so many blanks.

"Eh! Eh!" he would say, staring into the sky. "That must be 130 they're firing." And he would smile as if he had said, "We'll have nice weather tomorrow."

To please him, to forestall an attack, we had to control the distance separating us from the enemy's lines. Of course, he was eager to show off his knowledge, and to see better, he installed his telemeter on the parapet. At the same moment a Mauser bullet smashed one of the legs of the tripod.

"Better it than I," he said calmly, slipping back into the trench. "That apparatus has three legs, Roufignac only two!"

One of his manias was to stop men fleeing under a downpour of shells with:

"Hear that? That's a reprisal barrage!"

Then holding them by the belting, he would confide between explosions:

"Don't fear, my lad, they'll pay for that. Bang! Bang! Bang! If they hold out, my name's not Roufignac!"

DURING the night he would prowl about with his small electric torch, at the risk of bringing down a new bombardment. He lifted the canvas screening dugouts.

"Hush! Listen keenly, little ones. That smells like a raid."

He repeated this every night, without changing a word, but the expected raid never happened. It is certain that he suffered. He wanted to distinguish himself, longed for battle, and even if the regiment were decimated, he wanted to prove his plan correct before leaving the trenches. Oh, he would not be surprised by an attack, not he! All was ready for resistance. Even if the Germans took one trench, he knew how he would stop further advance. One night he had us erect barbed wire across a trench, and the soldiers bringing up the food did not appear.

"Well," Roufignac cried triumphantly, when he learned we had not eaten, "didn't I tell you no one could cross that barrier?"

That master tactician left nothing to luck. He had invented a loophole through which one might shoot as accurately by night as by day, thanks to notches which kept the rifle trained. It worked so well that once a rifle was gripped in the machine it could not be withdrawn. Also, since Roufignac's loophole was lined with metal, and each bullet would ricochet almost into one's face, no one dared use it. Only the colonel engaged in target practise from time to time.

"Seems to me a Boche yelled!" he would say each time he straightened up.

Satisfied with himself, he resumed his inspection.

"Smells like a raid, my lads!"

He was always preceded by Delormel, who was thinning visibly, and who slept standing. Back in his P.C. Roufignac allowed himself only four hours of sleep, and a cry invariably awoke his liaison men before dawn.

"To the pump!"

As he suffered from rheumatism, he had very cold water splashed on his legs every morning, a remedy of his own invention. Then, fresh and spirited, he would get to work. To start with, he wrote a letter to his wife; and another cry—"Pigeon!"—as invariable as the first, would bring a runner.

At his order a feather would be torn from one of the carrier pigeons in the cage, so that Madame Roufignac would find in the envelop a souvenir from her warrior husband.

This fantastic behavior made things easy for the captain-adjutant.

"He plucks pigeons and starves men," this man would say to the brigade officers who risked themselves to visit us. "If this lasts long, the birds shall be fit only for the stew pan and the poilus for the hospital."

Fortunately, the time for our being relieved was near, and when the three battalions had had their turn in the front lines, the colonel had to admit the evidence: The Germans would not attack! Still, a casual fusillade would bring him out of his dugout in long strides, but the crackling would die out like an April shower, and he would retire, grumbling, holstering his revolver.

"That's impossible! It's a sector for convalescents! Oh, if only they'd let me act!"

It would have been very simple, had he been given a free hand. The regiment would have gone over the top with band playing, led by its colonel, flanked by the Marquis of Something. But the staff must have distrusted his initiative, for he had been forbidden to undertake even a raid, for which he had asked artillery support. Lacking glory, Roufignac consoled himself by arranging for a return from the trenches in a way that would be long recalled. It was all right for ordinary chiefs to take a whole night to withdraw three companies from the front line and three from the second. Roufignac had methods of his own.

"You'll see," he told the telephone lieutenant, rubbing his hands together.

That was no lie. We saw.

Started at seven in the evening, with inexpressible disorder, the withdrawal was still under way at six in the morning—the communication trenches jammed, troopers marching in every direction, stretcher-bearers tangled among the machine gunners, the mortar crews cursing the sappers, the regiment relieving us unable to find its emplacements. As a successful climax, a wandering company, composed of the recruits who had been seeking shelter and food since the start, was belated and emerged from the trenches at daybreak.

They were spotted by a German balloon, and matters ended very nicely with a barrage on the main road. Perhaps twenty recruits were dropped. This was what Roufignac termed "withdrawal by decompression"—a method tried only once in fifty-two months of war.

THE general commanding the army had been informed of the various improvisations ordered by our colonel, and—as matters were presented to him with a purpose, and as he did not have the views of strategy held by Roufignac—instead of punishing the captain-adjutant and the three battalion commanders who had dared criticize a superior, he pounced upon the victim.

When the regiment reached the barracks, our old colonel was waiting for us, his left arm in a sling, his jaws clenched as on his worst days. We did not need more to understand that Garlic had been relieved of command. And as those abrupt changes never fail to bring about disaster to some, we learned at the same time that the tailor was in jail, with orders to unmend the regimental flag, that the telephone lieutenant was transferred to a line company for incompetence. All that was a bad omen, and we broke ranks in silence.

The most dramatic moment was the meeting of the two chiefs. The old colonel cast upon his liaison men such an icy glance that they felt cold down their backs, and without deigning to note the presence of the usurper, he spun on one heel and reentered his quarters.

Suddenly the unlucky Roufignac aged by ten years; by twenty years; by all the years he had concealed. A note from general headquarters had informed him that he was to leave for the rear, to manage a railroad station, or to command a depot of wounded men. Instead of smiling at this good fortune, he felt only the insult, the shame inflicted upon him before his men. His heart grew bitter.

Already he was alone. No one wished to compromise himself by being near him. His orderly had moved his belongings from the room, piling muddy boots on linen, and Garlic's trunks, locked and strapped, waited for him at the bottom of the stairway. It was not a departure; it was an eviction.

When he had placed his baggage on a truck he cast a last glance over the kitchen office, which he had crossed with such light steps a month and a half before. His plan of the sector was still pinned to the wall, and the maps, streaked by red pencils, prepared the attack. He could not bear to look at them long; he turned his eyes away.

"Well, I'm leaving," he murmured in a trembling voice.

No one answered. The sergeant had slipped out. The secretaries had their noses against their papers.

Then, faced with such ingratitude, Delormel sacrificed himself.

"*Au revoir, mon Colonel,*" he spoke bravely.

That simple farewell moved Roufignac. With a nod, he thanked the private, and to conceal his emotion he pulled on his beard, which was now turning greenish. Then, suddenly forgetting rank, he stepped nearer, hand outstretched.

"Good luck, Deschanel," he said.

The faithful runner grasped the hand heartily. And it was the only hand that Garlic shook when he left us.

DISSEMBLER *of the* PLAINS

By PAUL ANNIXTER

IT STILL lacked an hour of dusk when A'huah came trotting out from the native village that huddled at the edge of the jungle. He was a silver jackal of the central African plains, and one of the craftiest things that prowl. No other hunting thing but he would be abroad for full two hours yet, but A'huah was a dweller in two worlds, a breaker of every law and pact. His business was dark and devious, and his life was led accordingly. His day began at two after meridian and ended soon after midnight; but no one ever knew it.

There were reasons, good and sufficient. Time was when A'huah had been the friend of man. No shiftless, hard shinned, rock throwing native of the *boma,* but an Englishman—one of the lordly and conquering race. A commissioner, no less, who had tarried awhile in the palm thatched village, dealing out justice and order to the kinky headed ones.

It was then that the terrible thing had dawned on A'huah, the inception of his Judas rôle. His fear of man had died, that invisible wall that kept the rest of the wild at bay, made them slinking, hunted denizens of the darkness. It was an open sesame between worlds and A'huah kept it deadly secret. In the knowledge of it he was doubly dangerous to all the wild, and loved by none. Such is the penalty of too much knowledge.

The Englishman had first seen the wily fellow in his daily foragings through the village and taken him for some sort of dog—oh, palmy day!—a creature worthy of the choicest scraps instead of

kicks, after the queer custom of his own land. For two months and more, A'huah had prospered well. No day passed but saw him sitting beneath the kedi bushes behind the commissioner's dwelling, smiling inscrutably and lolling his tongue. The commissioner had come to watch for him. Strange man—never a stick or stone did he hurl; rather he sought to make friends after the enigmatical way of his race.

He held out his hand and coaxed and cajoled with soft, disquieting noises; but A'huah was no fool. Craftily he watched the commissioner, and coldly he studied him, but came no step nearer, condescending to be fed at a given distance. He could not have been said to harbor a liking for the Englishman; such feelings had no place in his cold and scheming brain.

He was a creature beyond the pale, colorless, too crafty to have a character. Yet some chord had been touched, a strange curiosity that gripped and drew. Was it some dim and buried spark that linked him with the tame dogs whose line had sprung from his? Impossible to say. But, now that the commissioner had long been gone, he still made daily visits to the grass thatched dwelling, with a strange faith that some day a luscious handout would again be waiting.

A'huah's day was already half over. He had fed after a fashion. He had foraged thoroughly in the village of men, in the forbidden haunts where the wild folk never knew he went. Now he was waiting for whatever deviltry the night might have in store, among the lesser ilk who toiled for what they killed. Extremely pleased with himself, as jackals ever are, he sat on his haunches in the middle of the plain and laughed.

The limitless dun stretches of the savanna were dimming from dull ocher to smoky violet in the hollows, as the light began to fade. In the far distance the great rampart of Kilimanjaro was a molten pyramid whose cone glowed with red and opal. Soft breezes just faltered between rest and motion, bringing the heady scent of plains flowers released by the day's heat. Soon a delicate mist of evening would rise, a sentient field through which kind would call to kind by wireless, as it were.

A movement caught A'huah's eye. Out from the native village at the jungle edge a man was coming. A'huah knew the fellow—he had robbed his chicken coop a week before when evil times befell. There was that in the man's movements which aroused interest. He came with stealth and caution, keeping to the swales and gullies. A'huah decided to investigate. Like a shadow he slipped out of sight in a ravine, and two minutes later, sitting beneath a bush, he looked on while the native planted a queer contrivance in the earth.

Two bent branches were placed in the ground with great care, then something was laid beneath, half covered with leaves. The breeze brought the whole story to A'huah—dead meat, well ripened under the African sun. A'huah was a stickler for such tidbits—aged in the wood, you might say; but he was certain of a trap. For there was the man obliterating all his traces. Well he knew that whosoever reached under the bent branches to eat the luscious morsel would be neatly garroted and left hanging there.

WHEN the native had taken himself off, A'huah circled the spot a couple of times, then sat down nearby to wait. A trap sprung but once—he had learned that well—and afterward there was often a double banquet: the bait and the baited. It would pay to watch this one. It needed only a victim to make this a night of nights. None but a creature infamously familiar with man and unspeakably perverted could have arrived at this bit of abstruse logic.

The dusk does not linger in the tropics. Not long afterward the jackal's keen nose caught an unmistakable reek that came drifting through the dark—the carrion breath that only the mangy folk

give off. A'huah knew them well; he had run with the hyena band more than once, when times were hard. They were coming up a dark ravine to the right, as horrid sounds proclaimed. The blackness was made hideous with ghoulish cries, whines and obscene coughings.

A'huah saw them top a rise, hunched forms limned in the last ghost light, and begin to quarter the plain, drawing cover after cover. Just there he made a wide detour through the mimosa scrub and trotted out to meet them, wearing an innocent smile.

In an instant he was surrounded by the grisly brood. They recognized him of old, but even at that it was a touch and go matter, for the mangy ones are a snappy clan, warring even with their own mates. They glared upon A'huah with their mad eyes that filter hate upon all the world, ten of them, each as high as a mastiff, and drooling for slaughter. But A'huah carried it off, as he carried everything, with his inimitable sang-froid. They knew his cunning and could remember the time when he had been scout and game runner to the terrible king of all the savanna, Rama, the lion. Certainly a fellow worth knowing.

They all set off presently, a phantom band, A'huah running to windward, for even he could not stomach the savor of these musty bagmen. A cerval cat was soon stirred out of the brush and she made off homeward with grotesque bounds that were capable of overtaking even the swiftest gazelle. A glorious chase ensued, and A'huah held his own with the swiftest of the scavengers.

The cerval cat led them on at first, thinking to lose them quickly, but the hyenas were famished, and soon she was put to it in earnest. Doubled up like a taut spring, she headed for the nearest timber. But all her speed was no match in a long race for the leathery lungs of the pursuers which knew no fatigue. The night was filled with slobbering moans as the prize seemed drawing closer.

Then something slipped behind the scenes, and the denouement was given the double twist as so often happens on the game plains. The cerval cat in mid-leap was struck to earth. One rasping screech that pierced the night, and she was out of the running; and above her the tawny form of the veld king himself took sudden shape, Rama and none other. His foot planted firmly upon the kill, he turned to face the speckled pursuers and the vast plain gave back his hollow roar of challenge like a sounding board. Every living thing for a half mile round ceased on the instant, all thought and motion in involuntary homage.

The pursuers flung themselves back on their haunches, the quicker to stop. Fifty feet off they clustered together, glaring with eyes phosphorescent with malice, all but A'huah who sat as usual and smiled. The king fell to feeding at last, ignoring all cover, though the moon was rising, while the ten grave-robbers skulked in the brush awaiting the bones and viscera. They wove in and out in nervous and intricate patterns that matched their craven minds, snapping at each other in passing, for such is the nature of ghouls. A'huah sat watching them. He was not overhungry and was having a fine time.

The yellow moon pushed up above the rim of the plain and bathed the weird scene, about the time Rama finished his meal. The king stretched himself to his full height, flexed each powerful muscle in extreme well being and then, lowering his head close to the earth, the plain echoed once more to his roar—a different tempo, proclaiming now that the sovereign had fed, that his smaller subjects having paid their toll for that night, were safe, and the king walked abroad for pleasure and courting only. Majestically he strode away, without even turning to look behind him.

The spotted crew closed in, but the pickings were lean and unsavory. They nipped one another in their frenzy, and the unpleasant sound of crunching bones

filled the night.

A'huah himself took a few bites with particular relish—that cerval cat having been an old-time enemy of his. Certainly she was out of the way now—bone, hair and sinew—and A'huah had double reason to rejoice. He had long coveted the cerval cat's dwelling—an old hyrax's burrow, beautifully remodeled after the ejection of the original owners, by far the most palatial residence of the plain.

But the cerval cat had been a fighter of sorts, and A'huah had had to content himself for some time past with an unfinished ground owl's nest, for building was not to his liking. Furthermore, he had reason to believe there was a cerval kitten or two waiting him in the new residence, and he meant to find out about it before the dawn. Certainly the night was progressing beautifully.

Of all this, however, nothing was imparted to the hyena band. He turned his back on them, in fact, that they might not see the smile that curled his thin black lip.

IT WAS not the hyenas' lucky night. Lamentable, but they had been foiled before, by the same king of the veld. Fortunately, however, for such as they, the endless stretches of the plains were alive with every manner of prey both by day and by night. This far corner of the African hinterland was still virgin, unravaged by man, and the gentle browsing folk, thousands in number to the killers' one, still bred faster than the bloodthirsty could decimate them.

They ranged in size from the bands of tiny duiker, no higher than a jackrabbit, scampering on elfin legs, to the ponderous harte-beeste and gnu, the quagga and the gay and dapper zebra. For such as these, quick death lurked everywhere; yet so vast were their numbers that fear had not yet devastated their peace. Memory with them was happily so shortlived that, a few minutes after death had visited their ranks, they would be quietly feeding again, for sacrifice is the common lot of those with the cloven hoof.

Not many minutes had passed before the dark plain ahead echoed to the thud of many unshod hoofs, and one of the great mixed herds that roam the game plateaus came in sight in the midst of frenzied flight. Doubtless Rama had passed their way, and the dread sight and smell of him had loosed panic at their heels. In like manner the king unwittingly repaid many a debt of high handed piracy.

Mainly the herd was of quagga and zebra, but, here and there over the low striped backs, the high withers and spiral horns of eland or harte-beeste could be discerned by the skulking pack, while scattered through the mass tiny antelope scampered in and out. The course of the flight would take the herd down a broad swale to the left, and the dog pack was scarcely ready. The question now was whether to risk swerving the line of flight by a direct charge into the ranks, or slink along a diagonal gully to intercept them. A short yap from A'huah decided them to the latter course.

Shadow-like, bellies to earth, they slipped from bush to grass tuft, flattening themselves to the shallow depressions. Their progress was a marvel of self-effacement, yet clumsy from any feline standpoint.

But, before they reached the line of approach, the stampede had suddenly halted, as is the way with these spasmodic flights. When death and danger lurk in every direction on the vast savannas, it is of little use to run far at any time and the herds had learned it well. Just over a swell the ten could hear the herd milling and clustering, faint signals passing through the ranks—the tremulous bleat of the eland and the queer short barks the zebra make. The pack covered the last fifty yards as if they had never been. Not a shrub rustled or a pebble was dislodged. Up the swell and over—almost to death range—when once more something

slipped.

The hyenas were in too great a hurry, for one thing. Also two minutes back a harte-beeste bull had caught a faint undulation on the crest of a rise and given an unguessed signal. So the herd were all trembling on the verge of second flight when the ten black shapes rose up and swept forward like a charge of birdshot.

A rolling thud and they were away. Only A'huah maintained a vestige of reason. Darting like a javelin past a milling knot of harte-beeste, he picked a young gazelle, separated from her mate, and plunging hysterically in the midst of a zebra band. Marvel of sagacity and judgment. Under the very hoofs of the zebra he slicked, ranged alongside the bounding gazelle, then a quick sidewise launch like a football tackle, and doe and jackal spun over and over, the former minus a throat.

As for the hyena band, they had hurled themselves upon the first prey in sight—two zebra mares. They were famished and, anyway, the hyena does not run to brains. The zebras were too self-reliant by far; besides, not one of the dogs had secured a throat hold. A series of pitching lunges and the vicious drumming of hoofs upon gaunt ribs, and the two intended victims literally wrenched themselves free of the pack and were off.

And now the worst had happened. The whole savanna for a mile around was thoroughly aroused by the sounds and the headlong flight. With ravening cries the hyenas gave brief but futile chase, only to give it up and come sweeping back to A'huah, already at his well earned meal. Hyenas have no manners and never will have any; besides, the trend of the night was well nigh tragic for them. They bore down upon A'huah, and for a minute things were rather embarrassing, young gazelle being service for ten instead of one. In the bicker that ensued, A'huah's left foreleg must have been taken for tablefare; at any rate it was half bitten off, which was rather fateful as will be seen.

All of this had taken no more than fifty or sixty seconds all told, so rapid is the trend of events in the night side of things. But what a change had taken place. A'huah, bleeding profusely, and shorn of his lightning speed, was no longer the guiding hand behind the scenes of events. The tables had been reversed on the instant; he was now but the smallest and weakest pawn in the game.

His position had become precarious and altogether unenviable, for woe to the weak, the aged, or the wounded on the plains. The law of the wild is pack law, and it knows no compassion or sympathy.

WITHDRAWN from the wrangle, and licking his useless foreleg, A'huah wished mightily he was out of the escapade and back in the cerval cat's dwelling, now a good two miles to the rear. He was clear out of his depth and knew it; each of the ten hulking gangsters with whom he had thrown his lot had twice his weight and strength of jaw, and on the slightest provocation would be slavering for his flesh.

The taint of his spilled blood hung in the warm air and had already floated to the nostrils of the hyenas. Now blood is to the carnal ones as the warm sweet reek of whisky is to the nose of the toper. They have nothing to offset it. The ten milled around A'huah with ghastly chuckles, eyes green lighted, and for the second time that night things hung at an ugly balance.

But A'huah was nothing if not a gambler. He turned his smile on them—the appallingly cheeky and utterly disarming smile of a jackal. His nerves were as case hardened as his conscience; such pinches as this made up his life. He showed by no cringe or flicker that he sensed the danger, and the hyenas, ever most circuitous, could not quite make up their craven minds.

Perhaps such brazen hazard incites its own benign protection. At any rate,

at this critical stage of things, came another of those lightning changes behind the scenes, that keep the nightly drama of wild life constantly on the *qui vive*. It seemed timed to the last split second to save A'huah's silver hide. From over the top of a slight swell another great movement of the herds became evident —another headlong flight. They came now from the opposite direction—from the south—heading straight down upon the ten. A moment, and the stampede was in plain sight.

The ten crouched on the instant, as motionless as the red anthills that rose about them. But the oncoming herd would have paid no attention had it been Rama himself who crouched there. They came on the wind's wings and terror showed in the white of every rolling eye. The front ranks were almost upon them before the humped ones leaped from cover. But the line of flight changed by not a hair's breadth. Eyes rolling, the leading bulls seemed totally oblivious, and it was the hyenas who gave ground and fled beneath the trampling feet.

There was no end to the herds. It was like a migration. And every tribe that browsed the plains was in the ranks. Some great stress was actuating every brain, igniting the mixed herds as one. The outlying flanks ran in erratic arcs, stopping now and then to gaze to the south, the bulls butting and goring one another in the aimless desperation of overwrought nerves.

Maddened by the sight of such plenty, the hyenas skirted the main body, waiting for an inrush upon the smaller and weaker. Then from afar over the moonlit plain came a call that froze the blood. It was the hunting cry of the African wild dogs. Only once in A'huah's lifetime had he heard that cry, a year when famine ravaged the land, and the terrible *wilde honde* of the southern velds had swept northward, killing as they came. Tall and heavy as the American wolf, and fierce as the hunting cheetah, the wild dog is the scourge of the southern plains. Nothing that ranges the broad savannas will stand against them. Even Rama the lion will abandon the fresh prey to a pack of these killers.

As yet they were still afar off, but some nameless instinct that protects the peaceful ruminants, subtle as the migratory sense of birds and fishes, had warned of the quick running death. With the first far cry of the pack every hyena changed from hunter to hunted and turned tail toward home, A'huah with them.

The bloodthirsty rapacity of the wild dogs' hunting cry is indescribable. It is insensate and fiendish and carries the shrill note that ever accompanies bloodlust. Imagine a series of short yaps, followed by a long moaning wail from a hundred throats in chorus, through which runs a ghastly sob—of fear, hysteria and an inexpressible woe—and you have some conception of the cry that came wavering across the plains.

In less than a minute from the start of the flight A'huah found himself hopelessly outdistanced. His broken leg had shorn him of half his speed, left him a disappearing speck on the rear horizon.

The hyenas, who are never of a stomach for battle, did the first hundred yards in about ten seconds and it was as if the ground had swallowed them up. A'huah found himself running painfully between two wings of the fleeing herds. Soon even the stragglers had caught up and passed him. Desperately he racked his wily brain for quirk or expedient. The wild dogs were his ancient enemies and bore him all the malice of a distant cousin who had foresworn the fold. They would make short shift with him unless he found a refuge.

The pack was close now, in plain sight upon the moon washed plain, over fifty strong, and sweeping down at the terrific pace that only the *wilde honde* can compass. A'huah cut down a black ravine at his three-legged lope, eye out for any chance habitat in which he might force or beg a shelter. But none of the smaller folk who dwelt there had his door open that night. The pack would

not miss his own bloody trail, of that A'huah was sure. Still, with the game herd not far ahead and the warm fresh scent of antelope still in the air, the chances were fair that the wild dogs would not pass up this chance of slaughter amid the countless hundred, to take up an old grudge with him. None would care for his musty meat, when the plain might be turned into a shambles.

Keeping to the rocks and thickets, A'huah dodged in and out, leaving a tangled trail that would puzzle the keenest. His brain was clearing rather than muddling under the strain. The call of the pack, louder and nearer now, was like the chill breath of fate. They must have found his trail ere this. Was their hunger keen? Was it meat they sought, or vengeance?

SUDDENLY A'huah flattened into a shapeless blot beside a rock and his thin black lips writhed afresh at what he saw. Just ahead in the thick gloom was a stirring of great shapes, yellow-green eyes showed, then a dread fetor came wafting. Rama—and with him some light of love. The king had been a-courting, else he would have been off long since, with those cries in the air. Too proud for flight, the royal lovers had waited in the shadows, trusting the enemy to pass on . . . But A'huah had been seen. And the ravine was the one chance of shelter!

He must have been upset for the moment, which was quite forgivable. With a desperate scurry, he attempted to dart past and up the ravine, but Rama was ruffled.

An interrupted amour is not conducive to tranquillity. He made a lightning sweep at the cheeky fellow, *en passant,* and raked his shoulder, then followed on with three tremendous bounds. The mere glancing force of the blow spun A'huah over and over like a teetotum, into the bottom of the ravine, where he landed by a hair of chance right-side-up and ducked again into the brush—just out from under Rama's snatching claws. The thickness of the brush gave him the breath of leeway to clamber up the steep bank with the same momentum, and out into the wash of the moonlight above.

The wild dogs surging into the ravine, not fifty yards away, saw A'huah emerge. The leader gave a bay and the pack swept toward him, just as Rama's head came into view not many feet behind. What A'huah did then was judged to a hair; but instinct told him, not reason. He ducked again into the gully bottom, leading the whole pursuit directly across Rama's path. The whole outcome depended upon him. The *wilde honde* were ever rife for slaughter. But would Rama hold his ground?

The answer came within the moment. The king was by then thoroughly and adequately aroused. Fifty silent, tawny devils leaped out of the dark and flung themselves upon him, and his mistress close behind. What followed was a raging, heaving inferno, down there amid the shadows of the gully bottom—howls, bellows and the horrid sound of clicking teeth. A'huah heard it as he sped onward down the ravine and plump upon the black opening of a cave.

Without even waiting to ascertain whether any one were home, A'huah darted in. Or no, that is hardly veritable—his nose, always several jumps ahead of his brain, had already told him that Rama or his mistress dwelt there and were naturally not in. Within the lair he stopped a bit to regain his wind.

There on the floor of the den were the remains of kingly feasting—picked bones of a size too great for any other jaws to crush; in the air hung the kingly fetor, which is like unto no other scent in all the wild. The acrid savagery of it made the hair lift on A'huah's hackles. And there in the rear of the lair was something else. From a bed of grass two wobbly, staggery cubs turned lambent eyes upon him from the dark. So the madame lived here instead, or maybe, also.

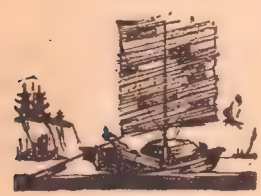
For a moment, cold blooded gamester that he was, A'huah thought of paying off his old score with Rama by a couple of quick throat holds and a hurried feast, but remembered that besides other calamities he was now lame. What he did do was a thing that none but a creature infamously familiar with man, and unspeakably perverted, would think of. He left his particular kind of calling card by defiling the floor of the den.

Meantime his ear had been acutely trained on the trend of the battle. Rama had been putting up a terrible fight, and his mistress had stood by him, else he might have been pulled down before this. The slaughter was terrible as the howls proclaimed, A'huah's natural enemies at each other's throats—a hideous carnage, fit tribute to the diabolical cunning of its instigator. All thought of him had long since been wiped from the minds of the wild dog pack.

It was plain now that the lions were slowly retreating to their lair, close pressed by the pack. Once in the cave mouth, protected from three sides, it was but a matter of waiting till the pack tired and took themselves off. But what of A'huah, pinned in the great cats' lair? He rose from his haunches, smiled, cast about for what he needed and found it. Then, just as the tide of battle surged to the very cave mouth itself, he vanished.

For it is one of the wilderness laws that no permanent lair or burrow in all the wild shall be unprovided with a back vent or rear exit. As the snarls of the dog pack took on the petulant note of rage and frustration, A'huah slid surreptitiously from the brush covered back door of the lioness's den and went loping away up the ravine in the general direction of the cerval cat's lair. He made no more sound than a drifting shadow; and he smiled as he went.

The night was still young—hardly his usual bedtime. And it had not been uneventful. He would visit the mantrap before retiring, to see what fortune had left there. Then home. He would sleep well and be up betimes tomorrow, to visit the native village again, for perhaps the Englishman might have returned.



Attack in the Dark

By

WM. ASHLEY ANDERSON

THE countryside was one of bad repute; and this happened in bad times.

All day long my two carts had lurched and shrieked over deep frozen ruts that stretched away interminably across the flat plain lying between Paotingufu and the Grand Canal of China. Our destination was a small, little known village by the edge of an obscure canal that wound away vaguely northeastward. It was bitterly cold. A steel-gray sunset showed no signs of habitations; but an hour after dark we heard the barking of village *wonks*, and we were soon lumbering down a slimy, irregular roadway flanked by mud brick hovels from which oozed castor oil smoke and the unforgetable smell of frying dumplings.

We halted while Wu went ahead to find an inn, leaving me sitting with an old walking stick on two cases, each of which contained, in round figures, three thousand dollars in cash. When Wu returned he was obviously disheartened and nervous.

"A bad place," he said. "But there is one room behind the Fisherman's Inn. You, sir, better sleep there."

"Where will you sleep?"

"In the cart. Very comfortable," he assured me.

It was too cold to argue, and I knew of course that Wu was quite capable of taking care of himself. Leaving the teams standing in their harness, my men slung the boxes of money from *kuntzea*, and with my camp-cot and traveling bag led the way to the Fisherman's Inn. It stood precariously on the edge of the tow path overhanging the chocolate waters of the canal. Strange junks and sampans were crowded there, and guttural sounds rose from thatched shelters as we passed. As we entered the door I had the distinct and uneasy feeling that we were entering a den of thieves.

The room was dark and dank with the fumes of cooking. Rickety, wet tables were scattered about the hard dirt floor. The orange gleams of a charcoal brazier looked at us from one corner; flames licked from the black sooty mouth of a clay stove in the other. The room was crowded with dark, weatherbeaten boatmen, who gave us no greeting but followed us with furtive eyes. The innkeeper was a small, wizened man, with wrinkled leathery skin, a wispy beard and greasy cotton coat. He spoke with shrill, forced hospitality, and escorted us through another door that led into a littered courtyard, piled with *kaoliang* stalks, boat lumber, and inhabited by chickens, rats and hogs. It was surrounded by a high mud wall; and at one corner was, literally, a hole in the wall; that was my room.

I've never occupied a filthier compartment; but I had no choice. It was about eight feet square, half of which was a dilapidated *k'ang*, upon which my cot was placed, with the feet in tins of kerosene to discourage the bugs. The ceiling was a tattered festoon of black, cobwebby rags. The walls were mud stained with the grime of disreputable years. The sagging wooden door had no bolt.

Placing the money boxes under my cot, I wrapped myself in blankets and lay down to gentle slumber. But first I took the only possible precaution. I passed a bunch of *kaoliang* stalks through the sockets in the door where a bolt was supposed to be. There was nothing else for me to do but resign myself to fate.

At the darkest, stillest hour of the night I awoke.

This awakening was not the normal rousing from slumber. A second before I had been sound asleep. Now, instantly, I was wide awake, every sense acutely alive, straining, reaching out impalpable feelers to meet the danger that threatened me. There was nothing but profound silence. I could feel the pounding of my heart, a-thumping in my ears.

There was only one point from which danger could come. Rolling over with the utmost caution, almost on the verge of panic, I dropped my hand until I found my walking stick. Some one was trying quietly to open the door!

I was cornered like a rat in the end of a drain. What could I do? Desperation suggested only one hope. I decided to stand by the door with my heavy stick, and the moment it burst open, jump out striking wildly and yelling at the top of my voice. I might break through and get over the wall before they stopped me with their spears and hatchets.

Shivering violently, I stood there poised. The low, gurgling voices continued. The stalks that held the door began to snap. All at once the door burst open. Lashing out insanely, I gave a shriek and dashed forward. There was a terrific uproar. My legs were knocked from under me, and I was struggling violently on the ground, trampled underfoot in a screaming mob.

I assure you that was a real battle, and I'm proud of myself secretly for the way I went at it.

But I could not have presented a very heroic figure to the solicitous old innkeeper a few moments later when he helped me to my feet, while his bawling hogs scampered wildly about looking for a shelter to take the place of the room from which I had ousted them.

Continuing

A Novel of Old Indian Days

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

THE STORY THUS FAR:

THE rich valleys of the Mohawk and Schoharie Rivers were greatly endangered by a strong force of Indians and Tories when Joseph Budd, a young American forest runner, was commissioned by Major Wemple to scout the enemy's strength.

In addition he was ordered to arrest a trader called Old Raoul, believed to be a British spy; and to search for a mysterious Red House which had become legendary in border superstition as a place inhabited by devils which preyed on American settlers.

Despite Budd's caution, he was captured by a roving band of Indians and taken to their village. He found Old Raoul in the camp, and told the trader that he intended to arrest him if the chance offered. Instead of becoming angry, strangely enough, Old Raoul devised a plot for the American's escape. Furthermore, the trader told Budd that Blum and Curtin, two American scouts missing for some time, had been slain by Indians.

Raoul's plan was successful, and Budd escaped that night. Fleeing before a hot pursuit, he came by chance across the ill-famed Red House. He discovered the door to be guarded by a gun trap, which he sprung with no harm to himself. The place was a storehouse for British food and ammunition.

On the trail once more, the scout met up with Captain Black, a renegade white, and his squaw, an Oneida woman whom

The Red Traps

he had scalped before making her his property. Black was beating the woman and Budd was about to interfere when the squaw suddenly turned on her oppressor and killed him. She then told Budd that she was the Keeper of the False Faces, a powerful Indian secret society, and urged him to flee to the safety of the American fort.

Budd heeded the medicine-woman's warning; but turned aside in the trail to stop at the cabin of Atel Grankin, stepfather of his fiancée, Betsy. The scout was greatly disturbed to find both the girl and her father mysteriously disappeared; and in a troubled state of mind he went on to report to Colonel Vroman at the Middle Fort. When he recounted the discovery of the Red House, Vroman shook his head gravely.

"But who can be the evil one who built and uses it?"

"I believe you have named him, sir," replied Budd. "It's the devil himself."

VROMAN tapped the tobacco down more firmly in his big pipe and said—

"You know who uses that place?"

"I believe I do," answered Budd, "but I mustn't mention names."

"Of course not, if your orders still your tongue. I'm wondering if you saw Raoul, the ginseng trader, on your mission."

The blue eyes of the old man sparkled as they studied Budd's face.

The young scout weighed his instruc-

tions. He knew silence would be equivalent to an admission. He lowered his voice and answered:

"You must never repeat what I tell you until it can be told to no one's hurt."

Vroman nodded his head.

"He was in the red camp while I was a prisoner," Budd went on. "He was at liberty to do as he wished. If not for his advice and aid I could not have escaped."

For a few minutes Vroman smoked in silence. Then he said:

"It was lucky for you that he was there. But it was bad for all the loyal people in this State. No man can serve two masters. I will say nothing, except that my heart is sore."

"I can trust you, sir. I'll add this: Raoul warned me against the Red House," said Budd. "He said my coming was known to the savages, and their scouts were out to pick me up because of that fact. Before that he warned me of Big Henry's presence in this valley. Now I must talk no more. I have more work to do. But you have some news for me, mayhap?"

The old man began to shake his head, but as his gaze happened to rest on the blue silhouette of Onistagrawa he puckered his white brows, and mumbled:

"It is nothing. The like can be heard every day in these dangerous times. I recall some gossip told by a farmhand from the north slope of yon mountain. He talked nonsense about queer lights and queer animals. He had been drinking last year's cider and was mixed up. If he spoke the truth something must have happened up there to frighten the farmers along the north slope."

His words took Budd's thoughts back three years when members of the Committee of Safety had used a cave on the mountain as a place of refuge. It still was called the Committee Hole. He had visited it several times as a youth, long before it came to serve as a hiding place.

"I have a roving commission, Colonel Vroman. I shall go up there. Between you and me, if Mr. Grankin and Betsy should return while I'm away, please tell the maid I'll soon be back and want to see her most especial."

"You'd be a thick headed fool if you didn't want to see her all the time," said Vroman. "I will not talk."

Budd's stop inside the stone wall was brief—just long enough to replenish his powder horn and secure a fresh supply of greased patches and a bag of bullets. He went afoot, as the distance was not considerable, and the employment of a horse would occasion many questions. He slipped away before his going was suspected and trailed his rifle toward the little kill which skirts the northeast end of Onistagrawa.

The valley was a fairyland of beauty. The foliage was taking on richer color values, but the leaves were dropping more rapidly. Stealth in the hardwoods was becoming more difficult each day. His thoughts were on the Eckson maid. In no wise could he question Grankin's judgment in taking her to a more secure defense. A craven was in command at the Middle Fort, and Budd vastly preferred to have his parents in Albany town rather than at Weiser's Dorf.

He kept to the east side of the little stream, until opposite Adam Vedder's place, when he crossed and approached the low house. He found Vedder loading a big two-wheel oxcart with bedding and other household goods. His several children stood nearby, but they were not watching their father. They were staring fearfully at the bush growth which skirted one end of the lush meadow. One might think they expected to see demons emerge.

"I am glad to see you, Adam Vedder," Budd saluted. "And I'm doubly glad to see you are wise enough to come off your place and go to the fort. You should have gone before now."

Vedder stolidly explained—

"Johnson and his white Indians and Brant with his savages couldn't make me haul off this kill."

Budd's brow went up.

"What is it, then?" he asked.

Vedder paused in his labor and scowled at the mountain.

"It is the light. Halfway up the north slope. No patriots are there. I do not like it."

"You are running away from a light you saw on this flank of Onistagrawa?"

Vedder frowned and was somewhat sullen of voice as he replied:

"I do not run. I go away. Slow. There was the light. I said it."

"Something burning—like a brush fire?"

The man glanced at him impatiently.

"With all so dry, so many dead leaves to burn quick, would a brush fire not have the whole mountain afire?" He shook his head emphatically. "Not a fire that eats through the dead leaves and brush. A shiny, smooth light, all in one place. None of our people will go on the mountain. The men sent there to watch for old Johnson came back. Something scared them. They will not speak about it. But they came back."

The long ridge was not hard of ascent. Several times Budd had traveled its length. Especially fond was he of the wide view it afforded of Vedder's property, also of the glimpse he could get of Tim Murphy's farm and mill, and the Upper Fort, just beyond the bend of the river. Attributing Vedder's fear to some of the many border superstitions, Budd endeavored to shame him by appealing to his pride. He reminded him that all the large tract known as Vromansland had been obtained under royal patent in 1714.

The farmer ignored him and proceeded with his task, the children giving all their attention to the bush growth at the bottom of the elevation. Budd announced—

"I will walk up the mountain and see if I can find this maker of lights."

FORTHWITH he started for the first slope, but he had advanced only a few rods before the farmer was after him, calling on him to wait. He halted and the man joined him, and with a hasty glance upward said:

"Mynheer Budd, it is something to be told. I did not intend to tell. There is the light, yes. But there is much more. My hired hand, Otto, told me. He is a sober, hardworking man. He is not one to be frightened. But he brought the story to me."

"What are you talking about? Some old wife's tale? A story to scare the children?"

Vedder glanced uneasily about and made sure none of his children was within hearing, and whispered:

"The mountain is haunted by devil-things. It is so. The children, after nuts, saw them. As big as oxen, with jaws so wide they could swallow a calf."

Budd laughed derisively.

"Your hired hand has been repeating some of the silly stories border people used to tell before you were born."

The farmer shook his head impatiently and called his hired hand. Otto, tall and gangling, slowly approached. His employer repeated what he had told the scout and asked—

"Is that true, Otto?"

The man was frightened. He kept twisting his head to watch the mountain, and in a jerky voice mumbled:

"It is so. They must drop down from the low clouds. I saw them. Devils with long tails. They ran around."

"And my children saw them," whispered Vedder.

"Otto, you saw nothing larger than a fox. Vedder, your children saw nothing. If I should ask them now if they saw a horse with eight legs up that slope they would say yes. That is the way with children—and with some grown-ups who should know better." Budd darted a scowling glance at Otto.

"My little ones do not lie," muttered Vedder. "They will tell it on the Holy Bible."

"I saw what I saw," whispered Otto, his gaze still searching the slopes. "They ran on four legs, but they were devils. The children saw them and ran for

home. The devil-things started to follow. A voice out of a black cloud called them back."

Budd had early learned that every race represented in the migration to the Colonies had brought over its own pet line of superstitions. The valley had had trouble with a German who firmly believed he could not be free himself from tormenting witches until he had burned a live puppy in the fireplace. Fairies, gnomes, demons, women and men who became ravening wolves at night, and on through an inexhaustible, horrible list ran the frontier superstitions.

The farmer, now growing angry and believing he should be well away from the heights before it grew dark, called for his little girl to come forward and tell her story. She had had time to work her imagination, and she added new and fearsome details for her father to shiver over. The oldest boy gladly gave his testimony, and Budd knew the two youngsters firmly believed every word they had uttered.

"No one, not in your family or not working here, has seen any of these things?" asked Budd.

"The light on the north side of the mountain many have seen," said the hired hand. "We folks know the devil is up there making hell broth."

"Stuff and nonsense! You keep me here to hear such foolishness? I am on my country's business. Bad times are ahead. I am trying to help—"

"Yes, yes," eagerly agreed Vedder. "That is why I tell you all this, Mynheer Budd. I must make you see the truth. I must show you something that is no lie. It is bad luck to look upon it. The devil will come for it this night, so we do not bury it. Come!"

He led the scout as far as the corner of an outbuilding, and Budd noticed that neither Otto nor the children offered to follow them. Vedder pointed and said:

"It is the devil's wish I see it again. I will not. But you, who do not believe, look inside."

Budd turned the corner of the structure and looked inside. Involuntarily he exclaimed aloud. On the ground before him was a calf, the head of which had almost been torn from the neck. He examined it carefully and was inclined to believe a panther had made the kill; but, if so, why had it not eaten the meat? Returning to Vedder, he admitted:

"Some creature with big jaws did that. But it's no devil; just some wild creature."

With a return of his natural dignity, now substantiating proof had been offered and rejected, Vedder said:

"We are not cowards out here, Mynheer Budd. We stay when the Indians come. We are not afraid of Johnson. If he and Brant could kill us, they would know they had had a fight. My people were like that before me. But we will not stay when the devil helps the enemy. When Otto and the children came running home, the little ones screaming, I and a neighbor, Caleb Becket, went to see what had scared them. We found the calf."

"You should have looked for a big tree-cat."

"No!" emphatically cried the farmer. "I have seen the long tailed cats and the short tailed cats. They are sneaks. I am not afraid of such." He glanced around to make sure he was not being overheard, and whispered, "I saw something else. I told none of my family. It would make them sleep bad. But up the slope I saw something that wasn't a panther, or like anything else I ever saw. It looked nearly as big as a small horse. It's jaws were terrible. I would rather fight Cornplanter with my empty hands against his knife and ax than to meet that thing. That is the thing, or one of the things, that nearly tore the head off the calf."

Budd had no further argument to make. Skepticism no longer was revealed in his brooding countenance. He was deeply puzzled and was beginning to have some respect for the thing on

the mountain. He accompanied Vedder back to his ox cart and watched him complete his task of transferring his few household goods to the awkward vehicle. The family was glad for his presence, and took it for granted he had changed his mind about visiting the top of Onistagrawa. Mrs. Vedder set out a jug of cider, some excellent bread, sweet dough fried in deep fat and a most generous cut of roast pork. The children kept close to the grown-ups and never once, that Budd observed, turned their small backs on the heights.

It was pathetic to see people who would not yield an inch of their land to painted savages coming off their farms because of a senseless superstition. Yet Budd would have felt easier in his mind had he known just what sort of beast it was that killed the calf.

BY THE middle of the afternoon the Vedders were ready to desert their farm. Their surprise, on learning Budd proposed remaining, was great. From the bosom of her gown Mrs. Vedder produced a small packet of colored feathers and urged the scout to wear them as a charm. She had obtained them from a famous witch-doctor down in Pennsylvania. It was generous of the good soul, although she was frank enough to say her generosity was prompted by the knowledge she soon would be inside of Weiser's wall. Budd fancied she was much relieved when he politely refused her offer.

"What charms do you carry?" she asked.

He patted his double-barreled rifle and the ax and knife in his belt.

"Mortal weapons won't help you," she said.

After the creaking cart had disappeared Budd walked to Caleb Becket's farm. All along the way he felt he was being watched. Once he was almost positive he detected a movement in some sumac bushes. Becket had served in a campaign up the Mohawk and had shown great bravery. Yet Budd, when he first sighted the place, believed it was deserted. As he drew closer a rasping voice called on him to halt. The entire family seemed to be in the low, stout house, and from the three guns showing through the loopholes Budd deduced the place was ready to withstand a siege. Before he could call out his name he was recognized, and the family emerged to welcome him. They clamorously insisted he spend the night there.

"You are not going to the fort?" he asked.

"Not by a jugful!" said Becket.

"Oh, I do wish you would, Caleb," moaned his wife.

"If you won't come off your place, why do you stay indoors before sundown?"

This question bothered Becket. He appeared to be ill at ease. He slowly explained:

"It's all along of some critter on the mountain that ain't of this earth. Hell must 'a' spewed it forth."

"Some wild creature. Maybe a panther. The Vedders were telling me about it. Their hired hand says he saw something. They've quit their farm and gone to the fort. Indians will be plenty in this valley soon. They are the beasts you are to fear. Pack up and go to the fort."

"No Injun can drive me off my place," vowed Becket.

"Then go because of the strange beast," Budd impatiently urged. "Over at the Vedder place it nearly tore off a calf's head."

"Godamighty!" gasped Becket.

He ran his tongue over his dry lips and glared up the slopes.

"The thing from the mountain!" whispered his wife; and she too lifted her head to stare in terror at the wooded heights.

Without a word Becket went into the house and returned with an ax. He ran to the horse-hovel and soon had his animal hitched to a cart. Still silent, he commenced dumping his few worldly

possessions into the vehicle. Budd gave a hand and drove out two cows and hitched them to the rear of the cart. When they were ready to start he asked Mrs. Becket—

"Did you at any time really see anything?"

Becket started to talk; but Budd hushed him with a gesture and nodded for the woman to speak.

She slowly answered:

"I saw something that Caleb didn't see. I never spoke to him about it. It was night before last. In the night I woke up and saw a light glaring on this face of the ridge. Looked like a big eye peeking down at our house."

"Bah!" her husband impatiently interrupted. "T'others have seen it. The witch light. But no light can scare me into leaving my place."

Mrs. Becket waited patiently, her thin face devoid of expression. In her dull, monotonous voice she continued:

"Towards morning I saw something else. It run across our field. It looked bigger'n a big calf, but it had the head of a dog."

"Godamighty! And you never told me!" cried her husband; and forthwith he picked up the reins.

"You was fidgety enough," she replied.

"The only thing you folks have to fear is an Indian raid. That's certainly coming. The enemy hasn't quit the East Branch yet. I've just come from there. It's very wise of you to fort yourselves now. When Johnson and his red raiders strike you will have no time to run for it."

"I ain't scared of no damn Injuns," Becket impatiently told the scout. "But why ain't something done 'bout this thing on Onistagrawa?"

"It will be looked into in all good time," assured Budd.

He gravely insisted the danger lurking on the mountain was very malevolent and apt to strike at any moment. So long as the family took refuge in one of the river forts he did not care what impulse sent them there. So, it was not Sir John's Royal Greens, white Indians or Senecas, or Brant's Mohawks that drove the Beckets behind a stone wall. It was the fell creature the woman honestly believed she had seen in the early mists of the morning.

At sunset Budd commenced a leisurely ascent of the mountain. He did not share the superstitions of the Vedders and the Beckets. He knew there was nothing among any American hills which his double-barreled rifle could not stop. And yet they had seen something out of the ordinary, something abnormal.

It was an ideal September day, and as his view of the valley broadened the higher he climbed, he clearly realized what a blight had come upon the gracious land. The sun was setting when he started out, but he kept it balanced on the horizon by his rapid ascent. The lowlands were in shadow before it slipped below the horizon. Again he had the eery feeling of being stalked.

The travel was not arduous along the top of the ridge, and he took his time. His purpose was to investigate the mysterious light in the shallow ravine, where the Committee of Safety had held its meetings. He kept along the north side of the elevation, as it was there that the lights were reported to have been seen. And he loitered, as he did not wish to reach the ravine before dark. The disquieting feeling that some one, or something, was near him persisted. He was too habituated to border perils to possess nerves.

He analyzed his sensations and decided the cause was not near at hand. It was more the atmosphere of impending danger. Nor was it anything near at hand which caught his attention and aroused his curiosity. A light flared far in the north. It showed brilliantly for the fraction of a minute, then vanished. After a count of ten it showed again, this time barely more than a flash. He could imagine a brilliantly lighted room, with windows masked, and could picture the signal being regulated by the quick

removal and replacing of a thick curtain. For some time he watched the beacon appear and vanish. He had to believe that the lights were telling something, or asking something.

THESE speculations became certainties when below him in the ravine there blossomed a ruddy glow. As this cleft cut into the ridge from the north he knew it must be the source of the phenomenon witnessed by the Beckets and Vedders. Picking his way cautiously, he discerned through the thickening shadows a shelf of rock halfway down the steep incline. Automatically he recalled how Peter Swart and other patriots had used the cave below three years back, when the first Committees of Safety were hard put to find meeting places without having the Tories on their backs. He began a cautious descent.

He felt his way so carefully he was confident he had given no alarm, and he accordingly was somewhat startled by a scuffling noise below. He halted and discovered that something was ascending the rough slope in a line which would pass close to his position. As the slight noise continued, with no seeming effort at concealment, Budd believed his presence was unsuspected. He crouched behind a boulder and waited. The light in the north emanated from human agency. Ergo, all that should happen at the receiving station of those messages could contain nothing of the supernatural.

The scuffling sounds multiplied until one might think a small patrol of men was approaching, and yet the noises came in too rapid succession to be the carelessly placed steps of a human being. Budd leaned forward and stared down in the gloom. His first view vaguely made out a long, dark object that caused a slight prickling of the scalp. The thing appeared to be seven or more feet long. Its approach was characterized by a certain disquieting, undulating motion. When within fifty feet of him it apparently broke in two.

Then green eyes were glaring malignantly up at him, and Budd knew he did not have to deal with humans, or evil spirits. From below the horrid visitors there came the unmistakable sound of a human voice urging the beasts on. He cocked his rifle, and the clicking noise evoked a snarling growl from the foremost of the beasts.

With an eye for a target, Budd fired, the report being scarcely louder than the snap of a carter's whip. The fearsome creature convulsively spun about and leaped far out to land with a crash on the rocks below, and almost instantly a hoarse, blood curdling scream sounded. There came a snarling noise; then the other beast was upon him just as Budd was bringing the second barrel into place. He did not have time to complete the shift. He thrust the muzzle into the snarling mouth and fended off the brute until he could draw his ax.

Now the creature was clear of the gun and erect, its paws smashing Budd's chest, its jaws grabbing at his throat. Budd's left hand caught the loose skin of the animal's neck and held it off for a moment, long enough to crash his ax between the green eyes. A second blow finished it. It was the largest dog Budd ever had seen, combining the strength of a mastiff with the ferocity of a tiger. From down the slope sounded a gasping, groaning sound.

The sounds down the ravine ceased. Budd reloaded the empty barrel of his rifle and carefully descended, the glow of the fire guiding him. When he came to it he discovered the source of the agonized death cry of a human being.

The huge dog was dead, atop the body of a man, the latter lying face down and terribly mangled about the neck and head. Budd removed the dog and turned the man over. He exclaimed in amazement at beholding Otto, Vedder's hired hand. It was but another unsuspected case of treachery. Doubtless not a settler in the valley ever had dreamed that the stolid farm worker was a tool of the Tories, or that his

duties had included the care of the "things" on the mountain. The huge dog, mortally wounded by Budd's bullet, had in its last spasms turned on its keeper, obeying the instinct to kill.

Budd was genuinely startled when the man's lips moved. Then he bent close and fiercely demanded.

"Who is it you work for? Tell me!" Otto's lips fluttered, and Budd distinguished but one word.

"Colliger."

Then with a facial distortion that became a fixed, sardonic grin, the man expired.

Rising to his feet, Budd took notice of the stench from burning leather. The bed of coals was half concealed by a green hide. Obviously Otto, at the first alarm, had started to cover the coals, but had been interrupted by the arrival of the mortally wounded beast. Back from the fire was the opening of a small cave. In this was stored dried bark, some blankets, candles and a smoked ham. The last reminded Budd of the Red House. He pulled aside the blankets and instantly leaped back and hurled his torch aside. He had uncovered several small kegs which he knew must contain gunpowder, intended for Brant's and Johnson's raiders.

Taking the blankets, he returned to the top of the mountain and passed the night. What the signals in the north meant he had no way of knowing; nor was he acquainted with any one by the name of Colliger, although Major Wemple had spoken highly of a man of that name. The presence of the powder afforded one bit of important information. It indicated that Sir John planned to strike the Upper Fort first, and that his own theory of the enemy's campaign had been faulty.

Before sunrise Budd was off the mountain and making for the nearest settler. He explained his experiences in part, but gave no intimation of the traitorous activities of Otto, and was content to announce he had found the man dead, killed by a big dog. The farmer readily harnessed a horse to a cart and accompanied Budd along the north slope of the mountain to a point where they could clamber up to the small cave.

"Gorrymighty, what a beast!" gasped the farmer. "Now to git poor Otto out."

This task was accomplished with considerable difficulty, and the kegs of powder were soon added to the load.

"Poor Otto was killed when hunting for this stuff," said the farmer.

Budd did not say anything to the contrary. The man readily agreed to see that Otto was properly buried and the powder delivered to the Upper Fort, to be further distributed as the defensive needs of the valley might require. With this disagreeable task completed, Budd took to the west side of the river and scouted through the forest to Grankin's place, hoping to find the Eckson maid there. It had been a wild hope and he was not surprised to find the cabin closed and empty. Yet he was disappointed. Before returning to the Middle Fort he set forth to visit the home cabin. As he breasted the slope where he had met Old Raoul he found the trees bare, but the squirrels were as talkative and abusive as ever.

AND again, just as if he were living over the last ten days of his life, he beheld the ginseng trader emerging from the woods, a hand up in a silent salute. Budd advanced and gave him greeting. Old Raoul halted and politely replied:

"*Bon jour, M'sieu Budd.* So you escaped? I feared for your life."

"I escaped, yes. But I found poor Blum."

"Aye, poor Blum!" Raoul repeated.

"I found the Red House."

"And you live to tell it! You are most fortunate."

"I entered it, M'sieu Raoul. I know its secrets. I found things that set ill on my stomach."

"Ha! Say you so? And what, M'sieu Budd, did you find?"

Budd fancied the man was greatly dis-

turbed although his outward bearing was quite calm.

"A map of this district, with tiny red hatchets opposite the names of our valley settlers."

Raoul's eyes widened and then half closed. He nodded his head and mused:

"Some one who knows the valley well is getting ready for Johnson's coming. He even furnished a map, and a list of those poor people marked for the slaughter."

"I burned the map."

The Frenchman obviously was disturbed by this. He shook his head dolefully and muttered:

"The boy of it!" Then with some asperity he added, "You acted in too much haste, M'sieu Budd. Now the owner of the Red House knows his secret is discovered, he will make another map."

"You told me not to enter that place. I saved my life by entering it."

Raoul stared at the speaker as if not understanding. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he asked—

"You met with no opposition, of course?"

"A man trap was sprung. I caught none of the lead."

"And you came out, how?"

"From the cellar. Through a hole underground."

The old man nodded.

"You seem to have been very active; to have learned much. Knowledge often brings danger. What do you think of it all now?"

"God knows! I can't decide. Major Wemple believes you to be a traitor, and I have orders to take you to the Lower Fort. You must go with me."

"Come! Come! What is this? What do you mean with your *must?* Every one knows Old Raoul is free to come and go. The French have finished their fighting in America except as they give help to your M'sieu Washington."

"General Washington," sharply corrected Budd. "See here—you did me a good turn, M'sieu Raoul. I want to be fair with you. Go with me to the Lower Fort and, if you can, explain things to Major Wemple. To make you go there would be very disagreeable to me."

The old face wore a peculiar expression. Raoul replied:

"I will see M'sieu the Major Wemple in good time. I do not wish to go to him just now. And you will say I must. Perhaps we can trade. You seek something that is lost. You called at an empty cabin this morning?"

"You were spying on me!"

"Tush. I walk through the woods. I see things. You wish to find M'sieu Grankin, the sober faced man. Much more you wish to find m'mselle."

"You put it overstrong. I desire some information as to where she went. Grankin thinks poorly of the Middle Fort."

"Ah, that Major Wolsey! He is always afraid for his skin. And M'sieu Grankin takes m'mselle to a safe place? Yes?"

"That is true," said Budd. "But no word was left as to where they went. Do you know?"

Raoul lifted a hand for silence and cocked his head to listen. Budd heard it. One of the fort scouts was calling in the south. The cry was repeated in the east; and, after a pause, in the north. Budd told the trader:

"They are on three sides of you, m'sieu. And I am here. Let us start down the river and call on Major Wemple instead of you going in under guard."

"M'sieu Budd, unless I leave you to explain that I have business elsewhere, it will be hard faring for m'mselle. Neither you nor your friends can take me to the Lower Fort."

Before he knew it, Budd was tricked again. From nowhere, apparently, a pistol appeared and was leveled at his head.

"Drop that rifle! Your lady is in danger unless I protect her," the Frenchman curtly said.

"Is her father dead?" whispered Budd, scarcely conscious of the menacing weapon, so great was his concern.

"Not unless he has been killed recently. But he takes her up the Mohawk Valley."

"And I have been in the Red House and do not fear any valley," said Budd. "And the Mohawk River road is as safe as the Albany Post Road."

Old Raoul shrugged his shoulders at Budd's conceit and reproved him sharply, though there was no trace of anger in his voice:

"Boy's talk. The Carrying-Place at the Oneida is a trap to those King George calls rebels. Old Raoul can protect her."

"You talk like a braggart," bitterly denounced Budd.

But he knew the Frenchman was no empty boaster. The cries of the three scouts sounded closer as they converged.

Raoul ignored the taunt and rapidly continued, saying:

"M'mselle's protector is what you call a fanatic. He fears M'sieu Johnson. He blindly runs away. The Mohawk River road is filled with Johnson's friends. They wait to join his army after he sweeps the Schoharie clean with his red broom. She would be safe at the Middle Fort. Worse than death threatens her on the Mohawk."

Again the scouts signaled. Old Raoul, with only the path to the west open to him, impatiently demanded:

"Do I get my road belt, or must I shoot you and take it? M'mselle needs my protection."

With a sigh, Budd surrendered.

"She must come to no harm. As a Loyalist you can protect her. But I shall follow you. The interview with Major Wemple must be held."

"*Merci, M'sieu Budd.* I wish you well for all your threats. May we never meet at De-o-wain-sta."

"Ka-ne-go-dick," mechanically corrected the scout.

Both meant Wood Creek, or the ancient Oneida Carrying-Place, one of the death zones in border warfare, and for nearly a century of utmost importance in all the old French-Indian wars.

CHAPTER V

DUBIOUS LODGINGS

THOSE settlers who remained on their lands were quick to hail Budd as he rode down the valley, keeping a few miles from the river. He found each isolated family much disturbed by the rumor that the impressment of horses and beef creatures was soon to take its toll. Their uneasiness touched his sympathies none, as he knew nearly every family, not yet come off its lands, was partial to King George. Loyal Americans were leaving their farms in fear of the Indians and Johnson's Royal Greens. He also knew there were no red axes against ninety per cent of those who tarried and slept sound of nights. Thus it was impossible to pity them. They worried none over the coming of the red horde, but they did fear that their livestock would be taken for the support of Washington's poorly fed troops.

The whole country was in a sorry plight, but New York was being subjected to a style of horrid warfare that none of her sister States was called upon to endure. Nor did New England waste sympathy upon New York. The orthodoxy of the Dutch was heterodoxy to the Puritans. It was this misunderstanding that caused New England to work for the elevation of the incapable Gates, the demotion of the capable Schuyler.

With white and red invaders about to ravish the borders and valleys, the land lacked men for a proper defense. The last return for troops for Tryon County was scarcely over four hundred men. With attacks down the Sacondaga into the Mohawk Valley and from the east branch of the Susquehanna, and from Oswego by way of the Oneida Crossing, there were the perils of the coast, and the harm worked by traitors within the towns and cities. And, unwittingly, the loyal had poisoned their varying strength by making paper currency legal tender. Quick to take advantage, the enemy had deluged the land with worthless counterfeits.

It was a stark, wretched country when one got back from the rivers. Nature continued her amiable working of miracles throughout the four seasons, but she could not conceal the abandoned houses, the untilled soil or the unreaped fields; or in any measure disguise the desolation which characterized the appearance of the farming communities.

During his ride Budd glimpsed a number of horses running wild, having been turned loose to escape the hands of the invader. His first stop was made at a pretentious manor house, some five miles distant in a due north line from the Becket farm at the base of Onistagrawa Mountain. As he had traveled in rather a roundabout way to mislead spying eyes, it was late afternoon when he drew rein and slid from the saddle. In addition to the big house, he noticed there were several smaller structures which were occupied by farm hands, or by tenants on lease. The fact that none of these had fled to the river was excellent testimony to their disloyalty.

At first sight the mansion had impressed Budd as being unoccupied. A nearer approach revealed open doors. He had dismounted close by a smith's shed and forge. He gave gracious greetings to the smith, a hulk of a man who eyed him suspiciously.

"I am in need of food and lodgings," Budd told him.

"Aye, forest runner, and so do all of us need beds and victuals. And victuals are hard come by just now, and this is not a tavern."

"Your barns seem to be bursting with a generous harvest. And I see you have a large smokehouse. I expect to pay for what I get."

"And I might use your money for keeping my forge fire burning, if you have enough of the poor stuff."

Budd clinked some coins in his pocket and corrected:

"Hard money, my man. Hard money."

The smith's black eyes glistened. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, then advanced and exclaimed:

"Then let's see it. I've looked on nothing but cursed paper stuff since this war started."

Budd fished out several Spanish dollars and for a moment exposed them to view. The smith impulsively grabbed at them, but Budd closed his brown fist and shook his head.

"I would but feel of them, fool!" snarled the smith.

"Hard money is good, but hard words are worse than paper dollars. Here, feel of this one." He held out a Spanish dollar, or piece of eight as it was often called. The smith seized it and tried to bite it, thinking it might be of pewter composition. Then he shoved it into a pocket.

"You can sleep in the big house. No one there."

"But the owner? He might not like it."

"He's away, and I have charge of the place. A man with hard money must be on the right side. If he returns he will be glad to have the right kind of company."

"I've paid high for my lodging. You should give me my supper and breakfast."

The Spanish dollar was of variable value at that period, ranging from six shillings in New York to five in Georgia and thirty-two in North Carolina. The smith, having his money, was inclined to be truculent and overbearing.

"I'll give nothing," he replied.

Then his dark eyes focused on Budd's pocket.

"I'll wrestle you to see if I get another dollar, or if you keep the money and I give you your supper, lodging and tomorrow's breakfast. Yes, I'll throw in good bait for your horse."

"That's fair enough," Budd promptly agreed.

The smith was a big man and very strong; but Budd doubted if he possessed anything beyond brute strength. He emptied his money into his handkerchief and tied a knot, then removed his

hunting shirt and weapons and placed all at one side. He walked to a patch of grass and waited. The smith tore off his leather apron and stood forth, a hairy behemoth, with arms so corded with sinews as to cause Budd to realize that victory, if it came, must be through trickery.

The smith sidled forward, his arms half extended, his thick fingers so many iron hooks. He was quite joyous with anticipation.

"Mayhap I shall bust a bone, forest runner," he warned as he came closer.

"It often happens in wrestling," Budd readily admitted. "But it may be one of your bones, Master Smith."

The smith became angry.

"Now I'm sure I shall bust one or two of yours."

Budd reached forward suddenly and slapped a bare shoulder with a resounding smack. With a bull-like bellow the fellow rushed him, but was brought up smartly by the heel of a hard palm driven stiff-armed under his chin. It seemed as if one might have heard his strong teeth click at a distance of fifty feet.

"Damn your newfangled tricks," he snarled.

But Budd noticed he worked his jaw from side to side to make sure it was intact.

"I have more and better tricks," the scout warned him.

"No trick can stop me from getting my hooks into your hide," roared the smith. "Once I do that I'll snake you out of your skin."

He began to work more cautiously, however. Budd ceased his mincing steps and stood motionless. Believing the traveler was ready to come to grips in earnest, the smith again flung himself forward. With a sidestep Budd was by him, and in passing he chopped the edge of his hard palm down across the back of the brawny neck. It would have sent a less powerful man to his hands and knees. As it was the smith sagged a trifle, grunted, and then roared with rage and wheeled about. Budd rapidly gave ground.

Inarticulate with anger, the smith charged at him, but as he would have thrown his arms around his adversary, Budd did as Mohawk boys had taught him. He gave back before the onslaught and dropped to a sitting posture. He was on his back as the smith crashed down. His raised knees and bent arms received the weight of his opponent, and the latter's own momentum, accelerated by a thrust from Budd's four limbs, sent him flying headlong and clear of Budd's body. Even as the smith was ploughing the grass, face down, Budd whirled and had him by the ankles and turned him on his side before he could collect his wits, or coordinate his resistance. Then he leaped upon him and flattened him out, and was erect and five feet away before the prostrate man realized what had happened.

"A fair throw, Master Smith," Budd claimed.

"Done by a damn trick!" panted the smith.

"I have others, but much rougher," said Budd.

The smith crawled to his feet and eyed his conqueror sullenly.

"Where did you learn them tricks?"

"From my friends, the Mohawks, when I would be visiting Joseph Brant."

The man's demeanor instantly changed. His voice was almost cordial as he asked:

"Why didn't you say you was Brant's friend? I might have killed you."

"As it is, you owe me supper and breakfast. I've paid for the lodging. Who owns the big house?"

"Colliger— Vernal Colliger. There is a bit of Mohawk blood in him, but he'll pass for a full blooded white man anywhere. That's why it's all right for me to put you in the big house, a stranger. The Injun in him expects one to come and go without any explaining. That's the way he comes home and goes away."

"He's away now?"

"Went to see Brant. With Brant for some days."

"I came from Brant's advance camp, but saw nothing of him. Several whites there, but none of his name."

"You went to Unadilla?"

"I told you it was an advance camp. This side of Unadilla. But Brant should be on the east branch of the Susequehanna by this time."

The smith nodded and, in a more courteous voice, said:

"He won't show it, but he'll be glad to find you here. You'll stay quite a bit?"

"It depends. I may be leaving tomorrow. I'm on special business up the Mohawk."

The smith picked up his apron and said—

"I'll show you where you will sleep."

He led the way to a rear door of the big house and conducted Budd to a small waiting room off the long hall. The floor was covered by a huge braided rug.

"Good enough bed for any man," the smith remarked.

Budd inquired—

"Just where is Colliger?"

"Traveling like yourself," the smith answered shortly. More amiably he added, "Went away yesterday in a hurry. He'll be back in a few days."

They left the house, and Budd put up his horse and gave him supper. The smith disappeared among the outhouses.

The rear door of the big house was open and Budd entered and noiselessly raced up a broad stairway.

THE mansion was two and a half stories high and very substantially built. The second floor was simply furnished. Budd looked into the room facing to the south and failed to find what he wanted. Ascending to the third floor, he was successful. In a room where the two windows were heavily covered with curtains he beheld a huge metal disk. Stuck in a wooden frame before it were half a dozen candles. Budd knew that the light of these, reflected by the metal, would easily be perceived on the side of Onistagrawa. The flashes of light could be produced by rapidly withdrawing and restoring the thick window curtains. Back of the reflector were several small sheets of paper sewn together in the form of a booklet. He carried it to the window and moved the curtain a trifle and examined it rapidly. It contained a simple code.

Fearing the smith might come in search of him, he pocketed it and hastily descended to the second floor in time to hear the fellow lightly mounting the stairs. Soft footsteps by one of the man's great bulk evidenced suspicion. With noiseless steps Budd gained the end of the hall and ran down the back stairs and passed out the rear door. Keeping close to the wall, he gained the west end of the building and dropped on the grass under an apple tree.

Producing his pipe, he lighted it and was reclining on an elbow smoking when a soft step behind him caused him to twist suddenly around. The Oneida woman, the Keeper of False Faces, stood behind him. In the Mohawk dialect she murmured—

"One watches from high up."

"The man who makes iron?" Budd prompted.

"That is the man."

"When the bad white man struck you in the woods I was ready to kill him," Budd said. "If he had lifted his hand again he would have gone among the ghosts."

"That would be bad for the man who killed him," she replied. "No man can stand between Ho-nun-nas-tase-ta and the man she sent to be a ghost. When he did this—" and she bowed her head and showed the scalped area— "he was a dead man walking. If a white man killed him two white men would go among the ghosts."

"You would have killed me if I had killed him?"

"It was for the Keeper of the False Faces to strike. Not for a white man. You are a Bostonnais."

This was Brant's term for all Americans in arms against King George and

was prompted by the first fighting in and around Boston.

Budd felt her eyes reading his very thoughts. She continued:

"This is a bad house for a Bostonnais. Go away before the man of the big house comes."

"I hunt for a white girl. A white man called Grankin took her away from Weiser's Dorf."

"She shall be found. Not here. At Do-ya-hoo-quat."

This was twice that Budd had received that information. Only Old Raoul had called the carrying-place between the Mohawk and Wood Creek, Deo-wain-sta. Budd had given it yet a different name; now he believed both he and the Frenchman stood corrected. He long since had realized that Indian place names contained niceties which the white man could scarcely appreciate.

He did not hear her walk away, but when he next turned his head she was gone. He smoked on for a few minutes, and then came to his feet as a big man, fully as large as the smith, walked around from the front of the house and approached. The newcomer smiled courteously and greeted:

"Glad to see you. You have been in the woods?"

"You must be Colliger? My name is Budd."

"Pardon me— Yes, I am Colliger."

"I have been in the woods," Budd now answered the query. "Too many houses choked me. Your man, the smith, said I might stay the night here. I shall be glad to pay—"

Colliger gestured for him to have done on that score. He stated:

"A guest does not pay for his keep at Colliger Hall. If he is not welcome he can not buy my hospitality. If he is welcome any sum would be too much to pay."

His tone was haughty as he said this. If the smith had not told him, Budd never would have suspected there was any red blood in the man's ancestry. His eyes were gray and his skin fair. As the two sauntered toward the front of the house Colliger confessed:

"I am mortal glad of company. Before this war came I had my house filled with guests and my cellar with good wine. But times are bad. One must be careful of strangers. What is your business up here?"

"I have a mission up the Mohawk."

"You are a forest runner." He paused and stared steadily at Budd for a count of ten. Then he said, "The smith says you claim to know Joseph Brant."

"I have been at his home more than once, and many times I've been in the Mohawk villages."

"That was before the war?" Colliger asked.

"Of course. Those ancient villages are empty now. But I am always welcome where Brant is."

Colliger asked no more questions, but became a charming host. He waved his hands and insisted that Budd should consider the estate his own, and go where he would. He stressed the last and, as Budd fancied, eyed him closely. The scout thanked him for his courtesy, and the two fell to discussing the parlous times. Budd informed him that a party of Tories had quit the Schoharie Valley to join Brant and Sir John Johnson; but he neglected to add that they had been captured and sent to Albany.

In turn Colliger told how Vermont Tories were meditating serious mischief. Only he called them Loyalists. Budd appeared to be pleased, although the news was a month old, the plot having failed almost before it was conceived. Benedict Arnold's treason was dwelt upon, with Colliger for the first time displaying any emotion. He was very bitter against Arnold for having mismanaged what should have been a simple and successful plot.

Sundown and the smith's summons to supper interrupted the talk. The smith's cabin was neatly kept, although his wife had all the appearance of a broken down drab. A stew of chicken and some new bread, and that unusual luxury, tea,

were so appealing to Budd's border appetite that he ate with unusual application. He felt constrained to give the woman a shilling, but Colliger stopped him with a quick shake of the head. A man lounged up to the open window as they were finishing and called out to the smith. As the latter rose and went to the door, Colliger followed him. The woman, as frightened as a rabbit when the dogs are upon it, glared with ghastly intensity after her lord and master. Then with her finger, and a splash of water for ink, she wrote on the table the one word, "Go".

Budd blotted the warning with his hand as he rose to leave. He dropped a shilling down the neck of the woman's gown. He would have given all his hard money to have known why she warned him to flee. He knew something must have been talked over in her presence: Some plan must have been agreed upon by his host and the smith.

The distraction at the door was brief. The meal seemed to have improved Colliger's already affable mood. He showed his guest about his property in the afterglow. From what he beheld and heard, Budd surmised Colliger was ambitious of being a country gentleman with a large estate, and of aping Sir William and Sir John.

Budd endeavored to cater to this vanity by remarking—

"With such a fine property and such a big house I'd think there soon would be a Mistress Colliger to share your ease."

The speech pleased Colliger, although the man's red inheritance prevented any cordial display of that fact. But his light gray eyes, always reminiscent of Walter Butler's, because of the peculiar fixity of their expression, stared at the speaker with a suggestion of approval. After a bit of a pause he confided:

"That lack will be filled once we've proven who is master along the Mohawk. There is a young lady, of no rich estate, but combining all the graces of her sex with the mind of a thoughtful woman, who will preside over my home when the times are more seemly."

"She will be fortunate in her position, sir. Your language is most polite. You must have read many books."

These compliments opened the door to the man's overweening conceit. Had he been all white he would have smirked. As it was, little fires were lighted in his opaque eyes for an instant, and the wide mouth twisted in a bit of a smile. He endeavored to speak carelessly as he said:

"I was educated as a gentleman. I have read much. I have been to England. I have many shelves of books in this house, but I needs must keep them behind locked doors else the ignorant in my absence would tear out the leaves for gun wadding."

THEY repaired to the house, the air growing cool, and found the candles lighted. The smith's wife was there, wearing a new gown. She fetched wine, then stood behind Colliger awaiting further commands.

"Some sweet cakes," he directed. Before turning to obey the order her lips formed the word "go". The cakes were brought, and as the two were eating and drinking the Oneida woman entered and came to the table, appropriating several of the cakes. Colliger displayed a flash of anger. He seized the woman's wrists and stared into her black eyes. She made no effort to escape; nor did she display any alarm. Her voice was low and self-possessed as in the Mohawk tongue she told him—

"Ga-go-sa Hon-nun-nas-tase-ta has killed a man."

Colliger dropped her wrists and glared at her. In Mohawk he asked if the man was the one who had scalped her. She picked up two more cakes and bowed her head. As she passed around behind his chair, she gave Budd a quick look, jerked her head toward the door and left the room. She was the second woman to warn the scout of danger did he remain in the big house overnight. Colliger was dominated at times by his

streak of red. He proved it by laughing mirthlessly and asking—

"Do the savages believe more in ghosts than do the white people?"

"I think not," Budd promptly replied. "The Iroquois believe in supernatural beings, and their False Faces. The white settlers seem to believe in almost every sort of witch, ghost, monster and what-not."

"You know she was speaking of the False Faces?"

"Ga-go-sa is commonly heard along the river. And I often was with Brant's Mohawks . . . That delightful event—your wedding—must it wait until after the war?"

"No. Once Sir John and Brant sweep the Schoharie clean and have cleared out the Mohawk Valley road, it will take place." As he spoke Colliger's mien became gloomy. "Why shouldn't there be forces we know nothing about? Does the worm know anything about the foot that crushes it?"

"Your point is well taken," Budd readily agreed.

"The Iroquois legends must have facts to stand on, if we could go back far enough," Colliger insisted.

"Their belief in the Stonish Giants makes me think that their men encased in stone were some of the early European seamen, with their leader dressed in armor," suggested Budd.

"That's the idea! Some little fact becomes a fairy tale if dressed up and changed."

The smith's wife reappeared and placed church-wardens and some excellent Orinoco tobacco, grown in Virginia, on the table.

"Some of our contraband trade through the Pennsylvania mountains to the south," explained Colliger. They lighted up and Colliger suddenly invited, "Look at some of my books. The war has shut off my supply from England, but I have a few."

He laid down his pipe and unlocked two long doors of white wood and revealed, set in the thick wall, several shelves crowded with books.

Budd stepped to his side and looked them over. In truth, he envied the man; all books were printed in England and this source of supply was shut off. Then again, books were an expensive luxury even to the rich; and a private collection of even modest dimensions was a rarity. He found Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe", two volumes of Defoe, one or more of Fielding and Sterne. The historians were represented by David Hume, Dr. Robertson, Lord Hervey and a new writer who was beginning to attract much attention, Gibbon. For poets there were Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith and Gray. Before Budd's eager hands could take the liberty of examining a volume his host closed and locked the doors. He commented upon Budd's "heavy eyes" and insisted that he retire and get his rest. If he felt weary, Budd did not believe his eyes betrayed the fact; yet he accepted the hint and yawned a trifle. He would have retired to the small room off the hall and composed himself on the thick rug had not his host ruled otherwise.

"The rug is good enough for a Mohawk, or a clod of a white man," said Colliger. "But the second floor will serve you better."

He went ahead with a lighted candle and escorted Budd to a room on the second floor. He lighted the tall candle at the head of the bed and cast a quick glance about to make sure all was as it should be. Then he bade Budd good night and with noiseless steps departed. With the door all but closed Budd spied upon his eccentric host and noted the room he entered. This action was prompted solely by necessity as he had resolved to see more of the house before he left it.

Placing a chair against the door and shifting the small table and candle, he produced the small code book and hurriedly examined it. It did not provide for the spelling out of words and the system must have been arranged according to a prior understanding. Three

flashes meant "reenforcements", and there was but one point where the enemy could receive it at the time of the signaling—the Committee Hole on the flank of Onistagrawa.

Two flashes meant "danger". This last would be of no value unless further supplemented by other flashes. Four flashes was "trader" and a two-four signal would mean "danger from a trader". Reversing the order of the words it became "danger to trader".

Budd had no list of the signals already made, with the exception of the one he had seen, referring to reenforcements. He tucked the book inside his hunting shirt, purposing to send it on to Major Wemple once he reached the Mohawk. Noiselessly removing the table and chair, he made ready to lie down. As he approached the bed something fell through the window and struck the rug at his feet. It was a pebble. He thrust his head over the sill and distinguished a figure below. Something swished against the sill. He made a futile grab and missed it. The next time he was ready, and his hand clutched a small cord. He rapidly drew it in and soon had hold of a stout rope. The figure below vanished.

Budd knew it must have been the Oneida woman, or the smith's wife. He doubted if the latter had the courage, even if given the opportunity, to risk such a service. The purpose behind the act was obviously to provide the guest with an emergency exit from the mansion, and presupposed the necessity of hurried flight. Budd looped the end of the rope around the short bed post and placed his rifle and blanket under the bed. Next he arranged the bedding in the semblance of a human form. The under bedding consisted of corn husks instead of feathers, and it would be impossible for one to retire, or rise, without making much noise. Budd pressed down on the primitive mattress and prodded it about to give the impression he was retiring. Finished with that piece of deception, he softly crawled under the bed and rested on his blanket, his rifle next to the wall, the ax at his side.

He had no fear of being surprised in his sleep, nor did he intend to go without some rest. Something inside his head was ever on guard when he slumbered in dangerous places—an attribute of all veteran forest runners, white or red.

THE warning came and found him instantly alert. He felt as if he had slept three hours. He heard no telltale sounds when he opened his eyes, fully awake, but there was the strong premonition to be on his guard against an immediate danger. Then came a faint noise, the slightest suggestion of a step close by the bed. There was a moment of stillness, broken only by the music of crickets coming through the open window. Then there was a violent exhalation—and with a grunt the intruder was viciously thrusting something into the bed.

There followed a moment of awful silence, with Budd fighting to suppress his savage desire to seize the assassin's ankles and upset him, and attack with knife or ax. Then came Colliger's voice, rattling white curses, followed by a jabbering in Mohawk. He stepped to the window and found the rope. Instantly he bellowed:

"Micar! Micar!"

Without waiting for an answer Colliger ran from the room, along the hall and down the stairs. Budd heard his feet strike the hall floor. The back door banged against the wall, and Budd crawled from under the bed and paid his second visit to the top floor.

He was convinced Colliger had discovered the theft of his code book before supper; that he had played the part of genial host to lull his guest into a false sense of security. The rope over the window sill was eloquent evidence of the guest's flight. So long as he lingered under that delusion there was nothing to hinder the scout from investigating more thoroughly.

In the room next to the one containing the big reflector Budd found a chest in a deep closet. It was secured by chain and hook, but the spike end of his ax soon ripped the staple loose. It was too dark to see what his groping hands were gathering, but he knew the nature of the stuff. It was paper currency. The big chest was filled with it. The very quantity of it was absolute proof of its illegitimate origin. Only the desire to throw the new Republic into deeper confusion, to cause Washington's Army to revolt, prompted the printing of the counterfeits.

Returning to the hall, Budd swiftly raced to the rear of the building and entered the third room. The windows were uncurtained and he had more light. Unlike the rest of the mansion, here there was no attempt at neatness. The place was partly filled with nondescript clothing of both sexes. He picked up a long cloak from the top of one pile of garments and found dry incrustations over the breast. He dropped it quickly.

His reaction was but momentary; for he had seen his share of blood. The owner of the cloak had been foully murdered, doubtless in the guest room where Colliger had come to make another kill. He found a large black hat, presumably worn by the dead owner of the cloak. He threw the garment over his shoulder and clapped the hat on his head.

Voices low, yet talking excitedly, drew him to the window. Colliger was saying:

"Keep still, you fools! With time to escape, would he go afoot when all he had to do was to mount his horse? Or take one of mine? Three of you take to the bush and search for him. Two of you come to the house with me."

"Do we shoot him if we see him?"

The voice was eager, and Budd identified it as belonging to the smith.

"Kill! I don't care how you do it. Two pounds, hard money, for his scalp. But you'll answer to me if he gets clear. Remember that he's afoot."

Budd retired to the hall and ran to the room containing the counterfeit money. Should such a huge amount be scattered through the States the balance might easily tip against America. Soft garments were hanging beside the big chest. Budd frayed out enough to serve as tinder and crumpled a note to form a cap-sheaf for the tiny mound. Then using flint and steel more rapidly than ever he had used it before he kept a stream of sparks flying into the inflammable tissue until a tiny flame bloomed. It was hungry, and he fed it more paper notes. By the growing light he observed his fuel consisted of eighty-dollar bills. Once he had a handful of these ablaze he pawed them to the floor and heaped more of the spurious paper around them. He raised a window a trifle to create a draft. Then he noiselessly returned to the hall and closed the door snugly behind him.

He elected to take his stand at the back stairway as there were several pieces of discarded furniture at that point.

From Colliger's cries and the men's answers he knew they were searching the ground floor, with the two stairways under guard. He heard them mount to the second floor as Colliger pressed the hunt. He heard the smith cry out that he smelled smoke. Colliger called him a fool and ordered him to keep his position at the foot of the stairs leading to the third story. Colliger now was beneath Budd's position, running hastily from room to room. Budd could tell when he finished searching a closet by the loud banging of the door swung violently shut.

"By Judas, Cap'n," roared the smith. "I may be a fool, but I do smell smoke most dingly. You can hang 'n' quarter me if I don't."

"Peter, run upstairs and see if there is anything afire," shouted Colliger.

Peter was near the bottom of the flight Budd was guarding. The scout picked up a heavy chair. Peter came up reluctantly, cursing under his breath. When he was within a step or two of the top Budd stepped forward and dealt him a clip. He fell toward his assailant without a sound.

Smoke was seeping into the hall from

around the closed door. Those outside now saw the red window and were shouting incoherently. The smith was howling and cursing frantically. Picking up the unconscious man, Budd descended to the second floor. From the third story came Colliger's frantic cries for assistance. Those outside entered the building by the front door. With no one at the rear of the building to bar his departure, Budd left the mansion by that exit, carrying the insensible man on his shoulder. He deposited his burden a safe distance from the house. When he reached the horse-hovel the Oneida woman was there waiting for him. She had his horse saddled.

"No one came down the rope," she told him. "The Keeper of False Faces is not fooled; I have waited."

He would have thanked her, but she scuttled away before the rosy glow, now blooming from the roof, could betray her. A man came running from the bush as Budd swung into the saddle. He came up to the scout, shouting—

"In hell's name, what's up?"

Budd was about to give him the flat of the ax over the head when the man recognized the cloak and big hat, and screamed as though mad. He ran away shouting:

"The dead come back! The man in the cloak is here!"

CHAPTER VI

THE WOLVES OF JOHNSTOWN

UNTIL well away from the flaring light of the fire Budd rode rapidly; but one could travel miles without losing the brilliant glow. Had Otto lived and been in the Committee Hole on Onistagrawa that night he would have been puzzled to decipher this new light. Into the thicket Budd threw the cloak and hat once worn by some poor traveler when he walked into the death trap. With his long rifle across the saddle he shifted his course to pick up the Schoharie and follow it to its junction with the Mohawk at Fort Hunter.

His thoughts were of Betsy Eckson, and caused him to hate the enemy who, by war, had separated her from him. He comprehended the history then being made as well as the average man who was surrounded and engulfed by ancient Colonial jealousies, which persisted despite the erection of a republic. He could testify that the patriots of New York had suffered much, and he resented Massachusetts' prejudice as directed against General Schuyler. He resented the tendency to award to that State the credit for carrying the first revolutionary torch. He believed that the two days of fighting at Golden Hill, between William and Cliff Streets in New York, entitled the latter to as much credit as the affairs at Concord and Lexington.

He knew that New York as a colony was as sincerely attached to England as ever had been Virginia and Pennsylvania, and was, next to the former Colony, bound to England by the strongest ties. Undeniably New York's great commercial enterprises had great influence with the officers of the Crown, and had resulted in much patronage. During the five years of war New York had suffered more red atrocities than had fallen to the evil lot of any State, West, or South. The extent of that suffering could be known only by those who made the sacrifices.

He looked ahead with no pleasure to revisiting Fort Hunter, although he held many fond memories of the place. In the happier days the Mohawks had gathered there and were his boyhood friends. The fort was the site of their ancient Ticonderoga, the Lower Mohawk Castle, and a strong bulwark between the settlers and any enemy from as early as 1711. Budd had often played with Mohawk children and they were his friends until war snapped the amiable bonds. Now savage was against the white man, and the latter was even more savagely arrayed against those of his own race, with brothers sometimes ferociously fighting against brother and father against son. Nowhere else in the

new Union was such terrible cleavage so pronounced. No other Northern State was confronted by the horrible dilemmas now daily besetting New York.

Thus Budd, riding through the glory of the dying Autumn, was saddened for reasons never experienced by the States more fortunately situated. He thought much of that great man, Sir William Johnson, whose first home in the valley was but a few miles below the fort; and he wondered what choice he would have made had he lived to face the crisis. He realized it would have been stark tragedy for Sir William to have chosen between England, whence came his barony and all his opportunities to prosper, and the new Republic and the new flag. Had he lived and traveled along with the patriots there would have been no red terror, such as the people were now suffering. The other alternative was unthinkable, for his influence throughout the Long House from Eastern to Western Door, was greater than that ever possessed before or since by any man with a white skin.

The light of the burning mansion had been seen for a great distance, and those settlers who had stuck to their farms were in a terrible state of mind. Many of them were fleeing down the Mohawk, convinced the red thunderbolt had fallen. Budd was belabored with questions as he rode by tenanted cabins or groups of terrified fugitives. Had Sir John Johnson struck so early? How could he come without the bush runners' giving an alarm? How many Indians were with him? Few would believe Budd when he explained that a big house had burned with no Indians nearer than the East Branch of the Susquehanna. A fire at night could in the popular mind be attributed only to hostile red men and the Royal Greens.

Fort Hunter, too, was alive with apprehension when Budd rode in. Men were hurrying to scout toward the source of the blaze. Budd told all such the truth to the extent of denying that any savages were responsible. The scouts kept on, properly enough, being under orders. To the leader of the first band he stated that Colliger was an enemy to the State and Republic, and urged that he be brought in. The leader replied he had no orders to capture one who stood so high in the esteem of the valley.

MAJOR WEMPLE gave Budd an immediate audience. To him Budd explained all that had happened at the mansion and described all that had led up to it. Wemple promptly dispatched more men, with orders to bring Colliger and all males in, dead or alive, but not to disturb the smith's wife or the Oneida woman. He then furnished Budd with writing material so that he might make out a full report which would immediately be forwarded to Governor Clinton.

After reading Budd's account the commandant added a line, vouching for the integrity of the writer. Not until then was food and beer set before the scout. While Budd broke his fast he related his experiences at the Red House and the cave on Onistagrawa. He presented the code book and told of the message he had seen flashed from the big house.

"You make it reenforcements," mused Wemple. "They could be intended only for Johnson and Brant. Such a band of men now are on their way to Unadilla, or the East Branch. They rode up the river path to cover their design. You had best follow them and see what you can learn. Grankin's indorsement of you stands well proved already."

With duty aside for a bit Budd inquired eagerly about Grankin and his step-daughter. Wemple assured him that neither had passed by the fort, and that the only travelers bound up the valley were an aged white haired man and a boy. The man had visited the fort and secured some food and the two then had gone on.

"You saw the man?" asked Budd.

"No. I was busy making out reports. He was just another refugee."

"I'm wondering if he wasn't Old Raoul."

"He never would dare come here."

"I believe he would dare go anywhere, sir. It would be very disagreeable for me to bring him here, after he saved my life."

"This is no time for such softness, Budd. You know your duty. I certainly expect you to do it," sternly said Wemple.

"I will do my duty," said Budd, his face bleak as he realized again the full meaning of the bloody conflict. "I expect he is on his way to the Oneida portage."

"Whenever you find him, bring him in. 'Tis a great pity my men did not hold him for questioning. By your own tell he stood you off with a pistol when you demanded that he accompany you here. Would he have done that, feeling kindly toward you, if he wasn't guilty as hell and realized I would be justified in hanging him?"

"He may not be so hostile to us as he is indifferent as to how the cat jumps," suggested Budd.

"By the Eternal! The cat will jump just one way for him, sir! Into a hangman's noose."

Seizing a quill, he wrote hurriedly, sanded the paper and handed it to the scout, saying:

"So there may be no question of your right to call on all loyal people to help you if you find that necessary, here is an order for his arrest. Kill him if he resists. He's a damned spy, and one of the worst because he is both daring and very clever."

There was nothing for Budd to do but bow his head in acquiescence. It was but another example of the terrible war being waged in New York.

Budd crossed the river in a boat, swimming his horse, and took to the saddle at a little eminence known as Tribe's Hill, the site of an ancient tribal town of the Mohawks, an old and important village before the century began, when the entire valley was roofed with virgin growth from Amsterdam to the Oneida portage. But the scout's troubled mind had no thoughts aside from his duty, and his worry about Betsy Eckson.

Fugitives were straggling down the river road, some in oxcarts, others horseback, and more afoot. He saw but few horses, however, because of the settlers' practise of turning them loose when threatened by Indians or Tories.

Budd's progress was slow for much of the way, as he often paused to question the refugees. None could give him any information. Their dust covered faces were all much alike and gave the impression of gray masks. The expression of their eyes was much the same and bespoke an overwhelming fear. Even those near the fort, frightened by the clatter of a runaway horse, broke into a run. Many of these unfortunates refused to pause and talk because of the fear ever at their backs. Those who did halt were filled with a frantic desire to learn of some relative from whom they had become separated. From a young girl, sadly frightened, yet capable of answering questions intelligently, Budd secured his first trace of Raoul.

She described a man he believed must be the ginseng trader. She said he had turned from the river road into the low hills in the north. Budd would know the spot, she explained, because of the charred ruins of a frame building where the man had left the road. This information almost relieved the scout's worries. If the old trader were traveling north he now would be in the wild foothills of the Adirondacks, and any pursuit would stand small chance of overtaking him. Budd feared it was treason, yet he secretly hoped Raoul had retired to Canada and that the border would know him no more. That much, at least, to offset the chance to escape from the red camp when the savages boiled a kettle for Aireskoi.

Budd pushed on, and at the end of

a few miles he came to the burned house. He turned off the road and took to a narrow trail that wound in among the hills. After riding half a mile he came to a low, stoutly built cabin, which at first he assumed was deserted. Wooden shutters blocked the windows, and there was no sign of life until he observed a faint thread of smoke lazily arising from the chimney. He rode to the door and gave a hail.

"You know you must kill me before you can enter!" answered a shrill voice, every tone of which reflected terror.

"I have no wish to harm you, or any one," Budd called back. "That is, unless you be one of Johnson's Indians or a Tory."

There was no reply for a bit; but the shutter moved a trifle. Then a woman piteously cried—

"I've been sadly beset the last twenty-four hours, and God pity me if I can't get down the river this day!"

"Can't you walk? Are you bed-ridden? I am a scout from the Lower Fort."

"You swear before God you ain't one of them that came here last night?"

"Readily, my good woman. You never saw me in your life before. I'm on business for the State of New York and the American Government. What's your trouble? I can see nothing to frighten you."

"Some of the Bowen band tried to break in. The same who did the bloody murders here last May."

"When poor Hendrick Hansen was killed," Budd added. "I'm Joseph Budd from the Schoharie. I'm looking for a Frenchman who talks good English. He has white hair and is known as Raoul. He is a ginseng trader."

"A man with long white hair ate here an hour before the Bowens came. If they met him in the woods they killed him."

Budd did not believe that. Raoul had been safe to go and come on the East Branch. He seemed to possess a peculiar capacity for venturing among murderous people and escaping unscathed.

"I also seek a man and a maid," Budd said. "The man is rather lanky of build and has deepest dark eyes. The maid is young and comely."

"Then heaven pity her in these dreadful times. None such has been near this place. A man and a youth passed, coming from the forest and traveling to the road. I had no speech with them. If you be honest you better be riding. Those men surely will return. If you be honest they will kill you."

Budd had seen a horse grazing at the edge of the growth back of the cabin. He told the woman:

"I am what I say, and can stand quite a bit of killing. Who is with you?"

"My little girl. My man is with the Army. Dead, mayhap."

BUDD had no trouble in catching the horse and leading him to the front of the cabin. He fashioned a bridle by noosing the halter rope over the lower jaw and then called for the woman to come forth and commence her flight. He promised to hold the road against all comers.

The poor creature was nearly insane from the horror of it all, and for several minutes could not bring herself to open the door. When she had removed the string bar she faced Budd like a tree-cat, brandishing an ax.

"You are frightening the horse," Budd quietly told her. "Throw a blanket on his back and I will make it fast. See, I lean my rifle against the house. Now a blanket and something with which to fasten it."

Without dropping the ax the woman tossed out a blanket and a long strap. Budd soon had the horse ready. He mounted his own animal and rode some twenty feet to one side. Still suspicious, the woman placed the little girl astride the horse and told her to cling to the mane. Then, still gripping the ax, she stepped on a stump and threw herself astride the animal. Budd called out:

"Now, ride. There are many fugitives in the road. You will be safe."

She burst into tears and set the horse into an awkward gallop. Budd watched her disappear around the bend which would reveal the open road. To make sure there was no trap awaiting her he cut through the growth and waited until he saw her emerge from the northern trail and ride down the valley. And thus she rode, with fear pressing her hard, as three generations of frontier women before her had ridden with red flowers blooming in the skies behind them at night, and the wind bringing the fiendish exultation of dancing savages.

Returning to the abandoned cabin, Budd set about a close consideration of his own business. According to the woman, a man had come from the woods in the north and one had entered. If the latter were Raoul, then he must have done one of two things—penetrated deep into the northern fastness, even into Canada, where it would be a waste of time, even foolhardy, to pursue him; or he had ridden several miles parallel to the road and then had re-entered it. Had he done the latter there would be danger of a pursuer getting ahead of him. Also there was the prospect of encountering the so-called Bowen band. This partisan organization took its name from two brothers who raised and commanded it. The brothers were definitely reported some time since as having arrived at Tioga Point. If the report were correct, then some members of the band had remained in the Mohawk Valley to plunder and slay.

In either event pity for the woman and the little girl seemed to demand that the scout spare a bit of his time in testing the mettle of those who waged war so foully. He gave closer attention to the cabin. It was stout, even if ungainly in architecture. Nevertheless it had been a home. Throughout the valley enough blood had been spilled to paint all such cabins red; yet the instinct to establish homes persisted.

At the rear of the house, and adjoining it, was a horse-hovel of thick logs. This was secured by a stout door. A second door led into the house. Budd put his animal in the hovel, secured the door, entered the house and barred that door. In doing this he noticed on the portal the Mohawk totem sign of the Wolf Clan. It had been made with the point of a hard stick. Budd believed it was sufficient to protect the house from Brant's warriors, even if white scoundrels did ignore it. The woman, presumably, had not noticed it; or if she had, it had carried no significance to her tormented mind.

"Old Raoul did that," Budd said to himself.

If the ginseng trader had meant it as a kindly act, nevertheless it was evidence against him according to Major Wemple's way of reasoning. Only the initiated could make signs which an Iroquois was bound to respect.

From the back window and peering through the thick shutters, Budd studied the woods to the north. While he watched he partook of some bread from his wallet, and some cold boiled corn from a fireplace kettle. He threw some uncooked corn out for his horse to munch. Returning to the window again, he detected a slight agitation at the edge of the bush growth. There was something alive behind that gaily painted screen. He expected a horse, or a stray beef creature to emerge.

It was a man who suddenly stepped into view. He was not either of the travelers the woman had described; but he was as thorough a looking villain as one ever would see. He turned and said something, and two other very unsavory specimens joined him. Then Budd knew that the rascals of the night had made good their word, and were come to bring shame and death to the woman.

Placing his rifle on the bed, Budd looked about for a cudgel. From the firewood he selected a stout club, easy to grasp and with a big knot at the end. It made an ideal weapon to use on those

not worthy of a bullet. The three men separated. One made for the back of the house, the other two running around to the front.

Soon Budd heard one trying the door of the hovel. He bawled out to his companions:

"The vixen's took the nag inside. We oughter took him away with us."

"Well, we've got the horse and her too, ain't we?" growled one of the pair at the front of the house. "No more foolishness. No prisoners. She had her chance last night. Now it's sculp-money we're after. Fetch a log 'n' batter in this cursed door."

Pitching his voice high, Budd called out:

"Go away! Go away!"

"After we've done our work here, ma'am. You had your chance. . . Now, all together!"

Budd drew up against the wall, the cudgel in his right hand and his ax in his left. The butt of the log crashed against the door and made it tremble. One of the wretches warned:

"Mos' prob'ly she's got a knife. But she'll be back of the door. When it busts loose just smack it back mighty quick an' pin her agin the wall."

Budd gently removed the bar as they were drawing the log back for the second essay. The log swung violently. The door promptly flew open. The precious trio, expecting the barrier to offer stouter resistance, came tumbling across the threshold behind the battering-ram.

Budd caught the foremost man on the back of the neck with the cudgel. A blow with the ax inflicted a mortal wound on the head of the second man, who toppled against Budd, and for the moment prevented him from using either weapon. This man was dead on his feet. Budd leaped back to give him clearance, and he fell across the still figure of the first man to die. But the third man was eager for battle. He leaped at the scout, screaming like a cat. It was a great satisfaction to Budd to have the murdering bully in his arms.

"You like to break into cabins and kill poor women and children," Budd said as the two slowly moved back and forth, each fearful of tripping over the prostrate figures.

"Curse your hide!" gasped the knave as Budd caught him in the stomach with his knee.

With a mighty effort the renegade broke loose and grabbed for a knife. Budd seized his wrist with his right hand and flung the arm across his throat, holding the man's head tightly clamped under his left arm and against his left side. He could feel the wretch's teeth trying to bite through the thick hunting shirt.

Suddenly the man ceased struggling to get at his knife and used all his strength in a desperate struggle to get free. He succeeded to the extent of breaking the grip on his wrist, and twisting about until his imprisoned head was facing the floor. Then his left hand began clawing at Budd's face, his right free to draw a knife.

He was slow in securing the weapon, the fringed sheath bothering him for an instant. Beating down the clawing hand, Budd darted his own hand to his hip and yanked forth his knife. The man knew death was upon him, and in a spasm of fury all but fought himself free before the forest runner could deliver the mortal thrust.

Budd felt him collapsing and permitted the body to slide to the floor.

"Even the Wolf Clan mark of the Mohawks could not keep you brutes away from this house," Budd told the prostrate figure.

The glazed eyes of the man stared back, and it was a few moments before Budd realized that the creature, like his mates, was dead.

TWO miles of travel and Budd was abreast of the site of ancient Osseruenon, where Father Jogues suffered martyrdom. There was scarcely a rod of the river road that did not recall some

racial catastrophe, tribal tragedy and many sacrifices to grim Aireskoi. Three more miles and he was at Fonda, the southern end of Sacondaga trail, and the home of the infamous Butlers. There he halted and renewed his questioning of the people coming down the river. For an hour he waylaid settlers making east in panicky flight, soldiers going to relieve some outpost and those who seemed to be drifting with no purpose.

His position was near a wayside place of refreshment, whose proprietor was torn between fear and cupidity. He repeatedly vowed in a loud voice that he would be traveling down the river after he had taken in one more dollar in trade. It was interesting to Budd to watch the man's fears combating his avarice. He was selling poor beer and coarse bread for paper money. Budd thought of the oaken chest, filled with the practically valueless stuff. The time he had allotted to waiting there was nearly up, when a German woman halted and hungrily eyed the coarse bread. Apparently she had no money, not even paper. Budd bought for her and questioned. In broken English she told him she had seen a man and a boy. He bought more bread and beer for her, but her information was exhausted.

The next party to halt, three women and a boy, yielded more generously. Budd made them his guests. They had seen the white haired man whom he described, but he was mounted instead of being on foot. Their description was quite minute and Budd was convinced they had described Old Raoul. He was disappointed he was not Grankin; for it hurt him sorely to know he must find the old Frenchman and take him, a prisoner, down the river. If convicted of being a spy for the English, he would be given short shrift.

After Budd bought more bread and beer, the boy spoke up to add—

"They was resting where they were throwing the ax."

"He means near Johnstown," explained one of the women.

Duty was duty, and the country was in a parlous situation because of worthless currency and various spies. Budd came to his feet, alert to be on the move and have done with his hateful task. He believed his man was within four miles of where he had paused to garner information.

He was loath to proceed with the disagreeable business and he made haste that he might not weaken. There was no belittling the debt he owed to Old Raoul, and in vain did he try to argue himself into believing that, if not for the like of the ginseng trader his own dilemmas would not have occurred. But this attempted line of thought was sophistry at best. Regardless of the Frenchman, he would have been captured near the East Branch—but he never would have escaped. He owed his life to the man and he must do his utmost to send him to the noose or firing squad. He hoped he would not find him, and yet pushed his horse sharply.

Aside from this natural distaste there was great need for haste. He must be back on the Schoharie, at the Middle Fort, when the enemy struck the valley; and the time he could spend in seeking Betsy Eckson was strictly limited did he do his duty in behalf of the Republic.

HIS horse, well rested, soon had him in sight of Johnson Hall, one of the most important landmarks in America. The charm and beauty of this estate, especially in the Fall of the year, was beyond description. Budd seemed to sense its influence, emanating from its dead master, as he approached. Although it had been abandoned since the war began he could picture it as it was when the grounds and buildings were overrun by Indians, coming to be placated, or forgiven, or comforted, by Wara-i-ya-geh. After his death the Indians claimed they could "feel" his ghost when near the place.

For the first time in many visits Budd found no Indians there. Nor could he discover any signs of Old Raoul. The last failure brought him great comfort. But he did come upon half a dozen men, dressed as farmers, who were making merry with liquor and the border sport of throwing the ax. On sight of them Budd dismounted and hitched his horse in the growth a short distance away. He then advanced boldly, trailing his rifle. At a short distance from the group he halted and watched the sport as might any spectator.

The men were boisterous, and the broached keg added much to their loud manners. Two things impressed Budd as being sinister and belying what otherwise might have been viewed as a bit of rustic sport. The target was drawn in charcoal on a shed door propped against a tree. It consisted of the outlined figure of an American Continental soldier.

The artist's skill was sufficient to leave no doubt on this point. Secondly, the man stepping forward to make the cast, and standing within ten feet of the onlooker, dropped something on the ground. Budd was quick to recognize it—a small brass plate, circular in form, worn as a cockade to distinguish the owner from other Canadian troops. The man stood forth confessedly as one of Johnson's Royal Greens.

Each man had taken his turn at throwing the ax at the head of the outlined figure, if the scars on the door told any story. The man about to make a cast paused and recovered his emblem. Suspicion was reflected in his swarthy face as he observed that Budd was watching him. He advanced toward the scout and said—

"Friend, you have a queer rifle."

"The times are queer. It's a good rifle," said Budd.

"You can shoot it good, I know. Can you throw an ax?"

"Not at that target," said Budd. "And who are you who would throw an ax at the likeness of an American soldier?"

"It's but an outline drawn on wood."

"Put a crown on its head if you be a good American. Then I will wager I can throw the ax better than any man here."

"You talk loud for a man so far away from the fighting," remarked the Tory. "I have had some rare fighting while you were at play."

The man laughed derisively, and asked:

"Where was the battlefield? We have been here some time. We have heard no guns. Are the Indians attacking Stanwix again?"

"Fort Schuyler," corrected Budd. The Colonials changed the name once the war came, although from force of habit many loyal Americans persisted in calling it Stanwix. Budd continued, "The fighting was near here. A scant four miles down the river road. Three rascals were bothering a lone woman, who lives in a stout house with her little girl, while her husband is away with the Army."

"The woman has been carried off?"

Budd shook his head.

"Then what the devil be you prating about?" blustered the man.

"I said I had some rare fighting. The woman and her child went down the river road just before the scoundrels came on a second visit. They found me in the cabin when they made their second try to capture the woman."

"Rare running, not fighting," the Tory corrected. "You seem to have gotten away."

"The three men did not get away."

The fellow was puzzled by this blind fashion of talking. His anger kindled.

"You talk like a crazy man," he told Budd.

"The times are enough to make any one crazy. I'm seeking an old acquaintance. One called Raoul. A ginseng trader."

The man's deportment changed. In an almost pleasant voice he said:

"Raoul has been here, but left a short time ago. How do we know you're his

friend, after your queer talk about three of our boys. I still don't understand what you mean by saying they didn't run away. They ain't the kind to run away."

"What does it matter whether you know, or don't know?"

Again the man's resentment blazed high.

"By Judas, young cock, you'll have your comb cut if you carry that bag of talk up the river."

With a sharp surveillance of the rest of the band, Budd quietly said:

"I'm here. I've carried that talk from Fort Hunter. No one yet has said me nay—except the three men who broke into the woman's house."

The man's eyes half closed with suspicion. His companions, interested listeners, became impatient. One of them urged:

"Give the young fool the flat of your ax on the side of his thick head, Simon. If that don't cool him down, give him the edge."

The group was slowly drawing closer—a move Budd had wished and waited for. As they advanced more rapidly he suddenly threw up his rifle, and warned:

"This gun shoots twice, like Tim Murphy's. Drop your weapons or I fire!" The command came with staccato abruptness. The men were unarmed except for their axes. They were nonplused by the change in the scout's demeanor.

One sought to temporize by saying:

"We are peaceful settlers of this valley. We are—"

"Halt!" Budd interrupted. Then to the man before him, "Pin your Johnson badge to your hat. Smart, now!"

The fellow fished it from his pocket and sullenly insisted—

"It's none of mine, I tell you."

"Pin it on your hat."

Budd cocked the rifle. The man hurriedly obeyed. His companions began to separate, but Budd swept his rifle back and forth and ordered:

"Fall in! Double file. Fall in, or I'll shoot the last two of you to get into line."

"This is an outrage!" bellowed Simon. Then he called to the others, "He can't shoot but twice. He knows he's a goner once he empties his newfangled gun."

In a way he was a brave man, for he must have known he would be the first to fall did the scout open fire. He was taking the one chance that Budd would prefer to withdraw rather than precipitate a fight which must end in his death. Instantly five hands were moving to grasp as many weapons. The man, Simon, stepped closer, thinking to brush the rifle barrel aside. Budd jammed the muzzle viciously against his breast, and the fellow became motionless.

"You can kill me," coolly conceded Simon, "but the boys will have your hair if you fire."

There was an interruption of the dramatic scene, caused by a seventh man, who burst through the bush north of the group.

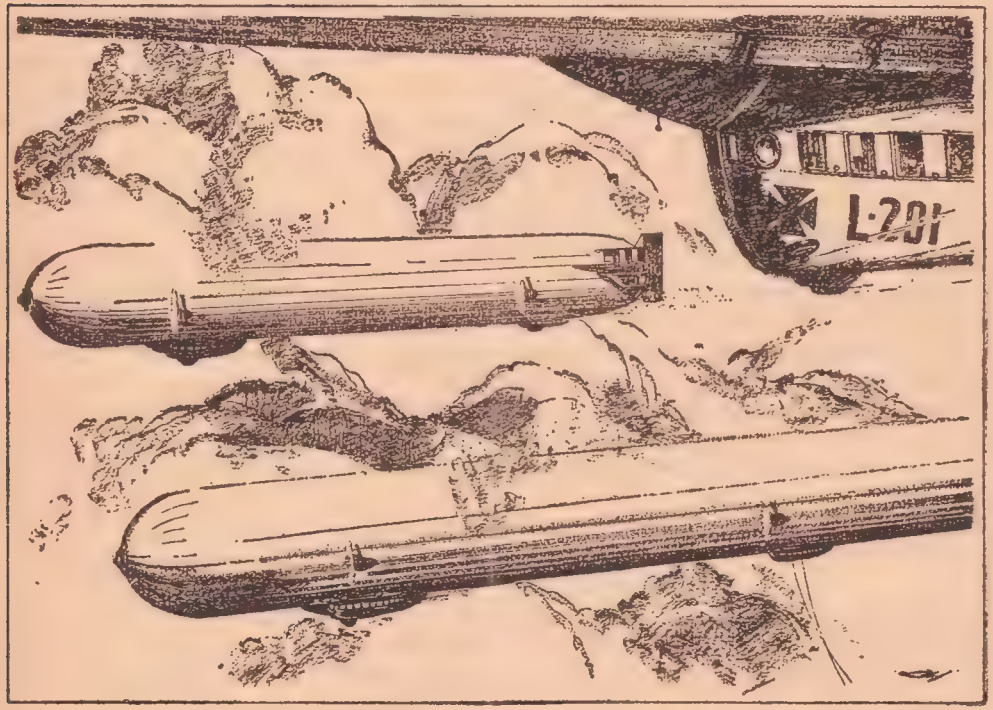
The newcomer could not see that Budd was standing on the defensive as the scout was directly in line with Simon and himself. Also he was too excited to observe closely, and possibly he had overlooked the presence of the stranger. He loudly proclaimed:

"Boys, our three friends won't ever come back! All dead close to that woman's house. Woman, brat and horse gone. But how the devil she ever done for them with knife and club is mighty hard to understand."

TO BE CONCLUDED

A Story of the Zeppelin Raiders

THREE SHIPS WENT OUT



By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

GOTT and the Zeppelins had strafed England; also France and Belgium. The time had arrived to punish Italy. Yes, as the High Command sized it up, the time was long overdue. Italy, with her almost insular segregation, was having it too soft. The war must be brought right home to those people beyond the Alps. Not, of course, that Germany hadn't already given the boot shaped country a goodly bit of war from the air. But now, in the hot Summer of '18, it was high time to let the swarthy, smug Mediterraneans hear a little of the real music of war. Some of that bomb dropping music that was being heard in so many German cities. Let them eat of the dish that Mars serves. Make them sorry for the many ways in which they were abetting the Allied cause.

Italy was the southern doorway of Germany's Allied enemies. That doorway had always been a problem, and it should be closed. Italy raised wheat and oats, cattle and sheep, potatoes,

barley, rice, rye and sugar beets. Things that Germany no longer got. It should be stopped.

From Milano, Turin, Naples and Venice came machinery and guns, autos and airplanes. And from Piedmont, Lombardy, etc, came the fabric and silk to cover those planes. All of which was important. They had rubber, too. And leather. Plenty of timber. To say nothing of wine. Italy, in a few words, was enough to make the High Command mad! Italy had just about everything that a warring nation needs.

What was more, Italy was a purveyor of manpower. She sent men north and routed them east, to fight over the Alps or harass the mountains where Germany strove to force the Balkan wedge. And all that should have been stopped early in the game. Italians should have been forced to keep all those native sons right where they belonged—on the home grounds, guarding Italy from sky spawned dangers. Zeppelin raids. Just as England had been compelled to hold back thousands of men, airplanes and guns. Well, it wasn't too late yet.

And of course the air raids were jobs for Zeppelins. Already the bombing planes—Gothas, Giants, and so on—had hurdled the Alps, out of Hungary, and hit at Venice. And at Bologna. But it meant five hundred miles of air work, in and out, for those heavier-than-air carriers. And when a wartime plane carried fuel enough for such a trip, she wasn't likely to carry much else. Bombs, for instance. At best, that long distance airplane bombing was hit-and-miss stuff; and Italy could go right along with her outside drinking and funny boating on the canals.

That too was a rub: Italy was making whoopee while Germans were on short rations. Twenty thousand seven hundred and sixty-seven Allied officers—Yanks, French, English, Canadians, Australians—were enjoying the war at such places as the Lido, Lucca, Varese and cool Vallombrosa.

Why, it was no war at all! How the devil was the High Command to get anywhere when it couldn't make all these dressed-up playboys of the Western armies take the affair seriously?

It had to be stopped! Make those Allied outside drinkers crawl under the tables! Make those singing gondola paddlers get under the boats! Make 'em all sit up and watch the sky. This was war! War! The thing that was wearing down the Fatherland, inch by inch, day in and day out, week and month on end. And if it was to be done, it must be done now. The break-up seemed very close for the Central Powers. Raid, they would.

Germany, with her army south of Sofia, Bulgaria, was within five or six hundred miles of Naples and Rome. The Zeppelin base in the Balkans, at Jamboli, Bulgaria, was to be the jumping off place. A raiding group leaving that station could, if it chose, follow an all-water route. The average airship commander would choose such a course, in view of the fact that hot mountains and heavy aircraft don't work well together. Of course, the water way wasn't always a bed of roses for the long sky ships. There were islands along the way that must be flown over, and enemy ships that had a habit of being misplaced here and there.

The Zeppelin seemed to be the natural target for every device that tossed shot and shell into the air. The Ægean Sea was alive with surface craft, going to and returning from Salonika. Sicily, down off the southwest point of the boot, seemed lonesome, and just aching to take a potshot at anything that sailed by. Then there were the Italian air bases down that way. All in all, the water route could be mighty nasty. But, on the other hand, the overland flight was plenty worse.

Zeppelins had been overland, having crossed the Balkan skies east and west, north and south. They'd been just about everywhere. And they had known disaster. Too much of that last

named stuff. The Serbs and the Bulgars barred the way, potting the German air raider from every mountain peak on the hot, southern airways. They were always where the Hun flyers least expected them. But that's natural enough in a neck of the woods that's as old—perhaps older—than mankind.

Of course they know every mountain peak, pass and plateau. There can't be many spots that they haven't reached. They're mountain people, and that's where mountain people live—in the mountains. At any rate, the German air branches had learned to look upon each high mountain top as a likely Waterloo.

Under cover of night a group of three Zeppelins took off from Jamboli. Rome and Naples were their objectives. The following night was to be the time of the raid.

Eighteen or twenty long hours spent en route were nothing in the life of a Zep. With its fuel cargo it could afford to do things in the right manner. No hurry. No rushing in and rushing out; or rushing in and running out of fuel when the time arrived to get out. Rightly handled, the big bags had the warring world by the tail. Unlike their heavier-than-air competitors, they were two-way ships. That is, they could go and come—unless knocked down.

Anyhow, it was a warm July night, which is the usual run of July nights in Italy and the Balkans. When the moon was at its best over Jamboli, along toward midnight, the three long ships took the air.

There were the *LZ-66* and *LZ-57*, both four-motored craft. The third ship was the *L-201*, a so-called super-Zeppelin. She was the flagship of the Balkan brood, 630 feet long, with 2,300,000 cubic feet of hydrogen, and a top speed rated at 85 miles per hour. Six late-type Maybach motors drove her. A ceiling of 25,000 feet was within her reach. Captain Ulm was in command; and the other two ships took orders from Ulm too.

THE *LZ-66* was under Captain Freytag, a commander of the new, not-dry-behind-the ears, hell-for-leather school. Freytag was known wherever Zeppelins flew, and all who knew him wondered how he did it. Enough to say that young Captain Freytag took chances, and always risked his own neck along with the necks of lesser lights. The rest of the lighter-than-air flyers claimed that Herr Freytag never sent a man anywhere that a man couldn't drag a Zeppelin behind him.

But Freytag was likely to send a Zeppelin where men should not go. However, he had a way of bringing his craft back. Not always, of course; for he'd lost two ships in the eighteen months he'd been with the service. Anyway, a mission in the hands of Herr Freytag was likely to cause some interest.

The *LZ-57*, a hard looking old wreck, was under the very able command of Captain von Bulow, noble scion of a noble family, and one fine nobleman of air. Captain von Bulow came from the heavier-than-air service to the big bags. He said that he was too old for the planes—this after knocking some twenty-four or five English and French airmen out of the sky, too. But Von Bulow was forty-four; and, during the late war, that was extreme old age for flyers. Fact is, there were few fighting airmen with long, white beards. Not that Von Bulow wore one, either. But the captain had the right idea. The planes were getting too small and fast for him, and he was man enough to admit as much.

On the other hand, the big planes were getting too big and heavy for him; and, being of gentle birth, that sort of work was too heavy for him. Even in war a man must take care that they don't add the straw that's likely to break his back. At any rate, Captain von Bulow knew enough to know that the time to quit airplanes had arrived; and he quit. Lighter-than-air

was the winner. Old heads were all too few in the swelled-up branch.

That hard-looking old ship, *LZ-57*, had grown that way under Captain von Bulow. She was a new job when he took command. But he'd sailed her against England. And he'd fought her against the Russians. Also, she'd raided France. The *LZ-57* was, during many months, the trial horse of the service. She was hard to beat. Hard to knock down. Her four motors each had hundreds of hours on them. Her rigging was like old parchment, seasoned to all weathers. And there was an old man riding the *LZ-57's* back. But the old cull wouldn't say die. Von Bulow loved the aged charge; and the crew loved Von Bulow.

The three ships, rising into the bright Balkan moon, took their own sweet pace about winning altitude. Those first minutes of climb would be test minutes, and by the time they'd reached five or six thousand feet they'd be all set to fall in and head south. To call the midnight air cool was to lie about the atmosphere. It was cool for that part of the world, at that time of year, but it was red hot air. Climb, under load, came slowly. They had fuel for seventy or eighty hours. The *LZ-66* and *LZ-57* each carried five tons of bombs. The big ship, the *L-201*, packed eight tons And her fuel supply was sufficient for a hundred hours or longer.

At 12:30, with five thousand feet under the three circling ships that showed riding lights above Jamboli, Captain Ulm signaled the other two. They fell in at either side, rear, of the *L-201*. The wedge of fourteen throbbing engines started south for the lights of Kizil-Agac, then Ardianople, and onward along the Marista River to the Ægean Sea. At 4:30 they were off the Dardanelles, standing out due south, and flying at eight thousand feet. The two smaller ships were at reduced power. The *L-201* was cruising on four motors. Hardly a sound came down to the dead waters of the sea over which they flew.

Daybreak found the wedge of three over that part of the Ægean which boasts the least islands. Athens was abeam at ten o'clock. Visibility was fair from above; but ships flying at an altitude of eight thousand feet could not be seen from the ground, or sea. The silent, lazy three slipped southward across the scattered Cyclades, onward over the Sea of Candia, and out over the Mediterranean. It was midafternoon by then.

Their altitude was no safeguard against the heat. There, at six thousand feet, men sweltered. The flight had dropped some of its former altitude, for the air was thin and the shiploads as heavy as ever. But the necessity for altitude had passed; and the broad loafing ground under them, the Mediterranean, had no ears to hear or eyes to see. There, a few hundred miles off Crete, the airships of the world could rendezvous and wait, never suspected, never in danger.

THE airships of the world might loaf safely in that spot above the Mediterranean. Then again, they might not. They'd be safe if they got down there unseen, as these three crews supposed they had. But they hadn't. Within an hour of their take-off from Jamboli, the Allied command at Salonika, two hundred miles to the west, knew that three Zeppelins were on their way. The Allied command knew not where the big three were going; but, perhaps, it had a rough idea. Before the three had passed Athens the Salonika authorities knew that this party was not to be theirs, for a wonder; and they had warned both the British and Italians by radio. So, as can be seen, the passage of the silent three was an open secret. Even Malta officials knew about it.

Malta is the British naval station of the Mediterranean. It is three hundred and fifty miles south of Naples, and on a direct line between that city and Tripoli—the last named port being the key

city of Libya, one of Italy's African possessions. Four hundred miles northwest of Tripoli is Tunis, Tunisia, large town and seaport of a French African colony. Tunis is within two hundred and fifty miles of Malta. And, as before said, Malta was and is the British naval base. There were planes and supplies at Malta. And there were Italian planes — big bombers — at Tripoli. While, at Tunis, the French, too, had fine flying equipment.

And on top of all that, Rome and Naples and Malta were in touch with one another by wireless. It was, as usual, a common cause. They knew that three Zeppelins were out on the make. They didn't know for sure whether the big three would make Malta, Italy or some one of the French possessions. But when the attack hadn't been made by noon of that day, the Allies got hot on the radio again and guessed that it was Rome or Naples that had been set aside for the moonlight visit.

If it were going to be any one of the islands, the Germans would strike during the day. You can't very well pick an island spot for a hit during the night. Not even when all things are in your favor, such as wind, moonlight, and a lack of searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and quick rising pursuit planes. The Zeppelins had tried that too many times, and they'd lost ships here and there where Allied island possessions seemed to offer the very easiest of objectives.

A miss is sure as good as a mile when a bomber drops its old iron in the general direction of an island, and only hits water. Enemy water doesn't seem to care who hits it. It just splashes, for friend or enemy, and that's the end of that. So many good bombs all wet! There's no percentage in it; and Germany knew as much.

When hours dragged by and noon came, with no report of enemy attack along the Adriatic Sea or Italian coast, the radioing Allies decided that Malta was surely the nut that Germany had decided to crack. Malta was a worthy and worthwhile objective for any enemy attempt. It has one city of 48,000 souls, Valetta; and any spot that Britain sees fit to set aside as a naval base must be worth watching. And if an enemy isn't in a position to sit around and watch, they'd better do their best to wreck.

Earlier in the game, when Imperial Germany had more and freer naval craft running loose in the Mediterranean and neighboring waters, Malta had been tackled. The attempt wasn't so good. Fact is, Germany decided that it wasn't good at all. Sort of rotten, to call it right. But Germany still had subs that were going here and there in the Mediterranean, and the ships from Britain's Malta weren't helping those subs in the least. Britain knew that the Zeppelins would strike at the base one day, and now things looked as if the day had arrived.

The naval force at Malta had a limited number of seaplanes. But the number was hardly sufficient to make sure that three Zeppelins would be stopped. Moreover, the seaplanes could not be counted upon to reach great altitudes, and the enemy big bags could. If Malta were due for this visit, something must be done. Arriving, the Hun must find a good crew on the job all set to meet him.

While three self-satisfied Zeppelins stood with noses into the light wind and whiled away the hot afternoon hours, five French Breguets took off from Tunis and hopped over to Malta. At the same time, four Italian Caproni bombers quit Tripoli and hopped northward to the same rendezvous. And at Catania, Sicily, one hundred miles north of Malta, eleven of those dolled-up playboys of the Western armies quit their outside drinking. Four of the eleven were Yank pilots, assigned to the Italian air corps. The other seven were Italians.

This brave brood hopped off in small land jobs—Ansaldo pursuit ships. They

were fast ships, and tricky. Nine of them reached Malta. One Yank and one Italian pilot were never heard of again. They went down, almost at the same time, at about the halfway point. None of the eleven was carrying wireless. Being land jobs, they wouldn't float very long. They didn't.

At two o'clock that afternoon there were twenty-five Allied ships all set to rise and fly from Malta. Five Breguets, four Capronis, nine Ansaldos. And seven English seaplanes belonging to the base.

In the meantime the Malta base had sent out no less than twenty surface ships, sub-chasers and fast motorboats. All these were equipped with wireless. Fueled and manned for fast, long duty, they fanned out across several hundred miles of the Mediterranean. Every now and then each of those fast surface crafts silenced its power while all hands listened. At five in the afternoon, from a point one hundred and twenty-five miles northeast of Malta, the sub-chaser *343* radioed in that she'd sighted the three enemy ships passing northwest. They were about one hundred miles off the tip of the boot, and Italy was no doubt the objective. So? No raid on Malta!

Five o'clock, and three hundred miles from Naples! The moon would set at 11:35. Plainly enough, the Zeppelins would strike directly following that setting; say, at midnight. Darkness, at seven or a little after, would find the raiding group making a landfall somewhere on the tip of the boot. Maybe at the Strait of Messina. The sub-chaser *343* said that they were heading for the strait, bucking a pretty stiff headwind at their altitude, seven or eight thousand feet. The *343*, making as close an estimate as possible, placed the Zeppelins' speed at no higher than forty miles per hour. At that rate, Naples would come under along toward 12:30. And Rome, if Rome were on the schedule, not before 4 A.M. Of course, as the commander of the *343* pointed out, he had no way of knowing that the Zeppelins were making top speed at time of sighting.

SO FAR so good. Malta had little fear that the Zeppelins would cause any damage to Southern Italian points. There was nothing of any size down there near the toe of the boot; and Palermo, Sicily, was too far west. To drop stuff on the small, unimportant places would only attract attention. Zeppelins didn't have that habit. They were never petty. Everything was on the blanket when they played, and it was "any part or all" with them. Usually all. They couldn't afford to cover hundreds of dangerous miles just to cover a small bet. No, nothing short of the big, well lighted targets would draw down those German bombs.

What's more—and Malta knew it—the Zeps would pass high over the Strait of Messina, keeping well away from the Italian naval bases and training centers there in the south. Then they'd stand out to sea, to the west of Calabria, and keep water and darkness under them till a landfall was made at Naples. And *on* Naples.

At 6:40 an Italian cruiser, swinging at anchor off the Sicilian coast, south of Messina, radioed Malta that there was a drone of motors above the Strait. The Germans were right on schedule. There were clouds at five thousand feet, the cruiser reported, and the motors were much higher than those clouds. If there were three Zeppelins up there, with a dozen or more motors—said the cruiser's report—then they must be plenty high, for the noise was plenty faint. But there were more than a few motors above the clouds, according to the cruiser's expert engineers. The cruiser also said that the clouds were local. Northward toward Naples and Rome the weather was clear and warm.

Malta's operations office decided that assuredly that was that, as far as Malta was concerned. With the Zeppelins crossing northwest across the Strait it

meant that they would not backlap and take a whack at Malta. The Zeps had a habit of doing just that thing—playing around, drawing the planes into the air an hour or two before they were due to arrive, then failing to arrive. Then, when the planes had flown for a few hours, exhausting the fuel supplies, the Zeppelins came back and struck. However, with the coming of darkness, and with the Zeps exposing themselves to the extent of crossing the Strait, Malta knew that there'd be no trick stuff that night. Naples was it! Now it was up to the planes at Malta to see that Naples wasn't tagged.

All the pilots of all those Allied planes were standing by, waiting for the word that would send them up against the inflated competition. The operations officer called them all into a huddle. To start with, he tried to persuade the Yank and Italian pursuit pilots that Ansaldo *chasse* jobs were not suited for the night flight north. To which those Yanks and Italians told the operations officer that they must get back to Catania at once, for they had unfinished business in that city. And could they fly, and land, those Ansaldos in the dark? Good Lord, English cousin, what's it to you? Bulletin nine young Ansaldo pilots as being in this promised party.

Well, Malta's operations officer had no authority over those wild ones. It was merely a kindly suggestion, after all, and if nine saw fit to risk their own necks it was jake with the operations officer.

A plan of action was mapped out. It was seven o'clock then and the enemy was somewhere just north of the Strait of Messina. Their rate of speed, estimated now by the operations officer, had been slow ever since the sub-chaser *343* had first sighted them at five. So it was reasonable to suppose that their present rate of travel would be their future gait, till Naples was reached. It meant that four full hours should pass before the lights of that city were ahead of the raiders. Then another half hour or so before the Zeppelins were actually working at their bomb dropping crossing.

And Naples is three hundred and fifty miles from Malta. Bucking the light wind that would cut a Zeppelin's speed down to forty miles per hour, an Ansaldo pursuit job would cover that distance in two hours and a half. A Breguet could do it in three. And the Caproni bombers and English seaplanes in a bit more than three hours and a quarter. It was time, right then, for the Capronis and English ships to get under way. Being heavy, with limited ceilings, they were ordered to take care of the air between the water and five thousand feet. As quick as they could quit that office the four Caproni and seven base pilots were on their way. Within half an hour, timing their getaway to a cat's whisker, the five Breguet men took the air. Their mission was to get up to ten thousand feet and patrol that layer.

Just before the nine wild ones were slipped, a wireless flash came in from Stromboli Island, forty-five miles north of the strait. It was a flash saying that the enemy ships were overhead. It was eight o'clock, and the Hun was on time. Also, that wireless reported, the sky was cloudless there. However, the enemy ships could not be seen, for darkness was on the sea and the moon not yet aloft. The Zeppelins were flying high and almost due north.

The nine pursuit ships got off the ground a few minutes after eight. It was agreed that they would run north at fifteen thousand feet, boosting that ceiling to the neighborhood of twenty thousand before Naples was reached. In that way, all likely layers of sky were pretty well taken care of. Of course, seeing the enemy, each group was free to start its own war. This without inviting the Germans up or down to any given level. All things being equal—as equal as 25-to-3 odds could make it—the next few hours should see something

doing in the line of high and fast warfare. A trap had sure been set—and now for the springing.

THE Zeppelins' lazy loafing, a few hundred miles off Crete, had been cut short. That position was all of two hundred and seventy-five miles southeast of the Strait of Messina. Captain Ulm had counted upon crossing above the Strait with the evening fog clouds. Fortunately, early in the afternoon, the *L-201* had picked up a wireless message from a U-boat which was doing a close-in prowl on the Italian coast. The U-boat's wireless told Ulm that a fair northwest wind was crossing the Strait region. It was enough for Captain Ulm, and he flashed that information to his two co-workers. The three ships stopped loafing, called for cruising speed on all motors and headed northwest. Every one was glad to get under way. The lower Mediterranean, with a hot wind off the African coast, was next to oven heat.

That hot wind came all the way up to five thousand feet, where they'd been idling. Then, after getting under way, that same hot wind was a helping tail-wind for almost a hundred miles. There, at the end of that distance, the African wind met that northwest wind, and the three long ships knew a half hour of mighty rough going. So rough was the travel that the *LZ-66* was almost forced, broadside, into the *LZ-57*.

Captain Ulm, out front of the other two, had met the rough going first. Then he had turned, to look aft from his control car to see what effect the sudden blow was having on the following ships. He saw the *LZ-66* sweeping sidewise across the stern of the *L-201*, and hell bent for the third craft. But Captain von Bulow must have sensed the pending trouble. And he had the correct and only remedy first crack out of the box: He dropped water ballast. And he dropped plenty. Right now! No messing with the thing.

Up shot the lightened *LZ-57*. Under her went the drifting, bouncing, out-of-control *LZ-66;* and so close was the latter's top to the under rigging of the higher ship that the lookout atop the *LZ-66* took one quick look, ducked, and made a record breaking dive for the ladder. During the whole war no man had ever regained the inside catwalk with such speed. In such ways are records made.

It had been close; too close. Two ships might have gone down in one tangle. But it was just one of those little things that made the Zeppelin raid something to remember.

The Germans, getting back into formation, rode out of that bumpy sky within half an hour. Then they found themselves bucking a steady blow directly from their point of travel. All motors roared at high speed; and the Strait of Messina's narrow neck, north of the city of Messina, was just eighty miles ahead at five o'clock. Which checks the accurate observation and report of the sub-chaser *343*.

Captain Ulm and his fellow officers, aboard all three ships, were well satisfied with the day's work up to that point. Only a few surface crafts had been sighted; and they felt sure that they had seen those surface ships without being observed. They felt sure of that, because of the greater altitude from which they did their lookout work. The heat haze and the pale blue sky made a silvery Zeppelin mighty hard to see.

So the job of hide-and-seek was good; and it had been all hide with no enemy knowing that there was anything to be sought. And the big three nosed into the wind, northwestward. The *LZ-57*, being light, was then all of a thousand feet higher than the other two. But Captain von Bulow chose flying there, rather than trimming ship by valving off hydrogen to counteract the sudden loss of water ballast. Maybe his ship would need every last cubic foot of its buoyant gas before this night's work had ended. Von Bulow was old enough

in the game to know that, too.

Anyway, formation work wouldn't last much longer. Before the time came to strike Naples, all three Zeppelins would break formation, sail out on their own, and hit the city from different directions and at three different times. It was the usual mode of airship attack.

In that way the searchlights might get one of them, but not all of them at once.

Shortly after six o'clock, just as the misty shoreline of Sicily was coming into view, the first clouds began to drift under and around the ships. For awhile the *L-201* and *LZ-66* were lost to view from the higher *LZ-57*. With the coming of those clouds Captain Ulm signaled Captain Freytag to get above it; while he, and his *L-201,* made no move to get out of the layer of curtailed visibility. Freytag got above it at eight thousand feet. Von Bulow was even higher by then, at nine thousand. The three ships, however, kept in radio touch with one another, carrying on at the former speed.

At seven o'clock, when the three ships should have been sailing over the neck of the Strait, Captain Ulm ordered the *L-201's* cable spider lowered for an observation. The cable spider, a small car dangling under the ship at the end of a light gage cable, was used by few Zeppelins; but the *L-201* happened to be one so equipped. The spider monkey riding the car was Ulm's navigation officer, Lieutenant Ober. Ober and his spider dropped through the clouds five hundred feet below the ship. But that wasn't the bottom of the cloud layer, so Ober soon telephoned for more cable. Six hundred feet. Then seven. Now Lieutenant Ober got a view of the locality, and located Reggio di Calabria, Italy, and, across the Strait, the larger city of Messina.

Everything checked O.K. for Lieutenant Ober; and he'd have been willing to bet his shirt that the Kaiser's boys were still keeping their secret. But at almost the same minute, or a few minutes later, the Messina wireless was telling Malta that the sound of high flying enemy motors was passing just north of that place on the map. Such is life, even for the most secret of secret flyers. At times an airman, even behind clouds, might just as well be living in the well known glass house.

At eight o'clock the three ships were in a clear, moonless sky. Captain Ulm —and Lieutenant Ober, who'd been raised again—tried to spot the lights of Stromboli Island. There were no lights showing; but that wasn't so strange, for it was only a small spot on a large sea.

Still, the island's lighthouse should have been flashing. Well, it didn't matter, for they had the lights of the Italian shore, only fifty miles to starboard. But they didn't have any lights there! Funny. Then again, it wasn't funny. There are no large cities on that shoreline south of the Gulf of Policastro. What's more, fifty miles, on a hot night, is quite a distance to pick up ordinary city lights. At any rate, Stromboli or no Stromboli, they knew that they were headed right. Hadn't they just cleared the Strait of Messina?

As before noted, Stromboli Island had doused all lights, even the flash of its lighthouse, and radioed Malta that the enemy was on time, passing north. And while the self-satisfied, cock-sure big three carried on, all those ships were hopping off at Malta. This was just about the time that was happening.

The Zeppelins, keeping in close touch with one another, had not changed their elevations upon coming into the clear. The rising moon, making the horizon at 8:15, found them there in three great steps. Keeping those great vertical distances between, they were able to keep all riding lights doused. The moon hit and silvered each bag, and that showed each control car where the other two Zeppelins were flying.

The night air was growing exceptionally cold for that time of year, and that latitude. From sundown there had been a steady drop of temperature; while the barometer had held its own. It was

good air. Heavy air. The kind of sky that lent itself to fine altitude for aircraft. Steadily, after eight o'clock, the three ships had gone up and up. Soon, within the next hour perhaps, they might expect searchlights. They would be within a hundred miles of Naples. The coast guard units, off Pisciotta and the Gulf of Salerno, had always been active. Moreover, there'd be naval craft in the lower Bay of Naples. Best that the visitors get high and sneak in with the drum and throb of their fourteen motors beyond the reach of earthly ears.

At nine o'clock, when the three were of the Gulf of Policastro, the *L-201* was cruising at twelve thousand feet. The *LZ-66* was at thirteen thousand five hundred and the *LZ-57* still topping the pile at fifteen thousand. They were then eighty miles from Naples. The *LZ-57's* outside thermometer showed a low reading, ten above zero. The air was clear, and visibility almost without limit. The Apennines, sixty or seventy miles to starboard, were visible under the bright light of the Summer moon. And the lights of Naples—No! Those were not the lights of Naples. They were the lights of Rome, nearly two hundred miles to port. There were no lights showing where Naples should be. And there were no lights down there on the south shore out of Naples, at Salerno and numerous other towns that were large enough to furnish many lights. Strange, that!

Captain von Bulow radioed his finding to the lower ships. They already knew that the Naples district was dark. And by then all hands realized that they were working on a secret that wasn't anything like a secret. The carefully flown mission was, perhaps, as much on the defensive as on the offensive; and it was good to know as much. And it would be wise to guard against any and all things that might happen. So thinking, three able Zeppelin commanders took their fat charges to a new and higher level. Even the wild and willing Captain Freytag had taken the elevator. At 9:30, when they were abeam Pisciotta, the *LZ-57* was at eighteen thousand and the *LZ-66* and *L-201* at seventeen thousand and sixteen thousand feet respectively.

There was a chill to the air and a tension on all three crews. Things might happen any time now. They were anxious to reach the time and point where Captain Ulm would signal them to break formation, and go their way. Bombs had been serviced with fuses. The speed of the motors had been boosted almost to full gun. The three raiders were in the home stretch. And they were due to reach Naples before twelve o'clock, unless Captain Ulm decided to swing wide, lay to and wait for the moon to set at 11:35.

Ten o'clock came. It found them as before, in the three great steps. And ten o'clock slipped by, with no "break formation" from Ulm.

ALSO at ten o'clock three Caproni bombers and five English seaplanes were almost abeam the three Zeppelins. Flying down there at five thousand feet, keeping the shoreline within safe distance, they were coming up the Italian west coast with two-thirds of the Malta-Naples distance behind them. Ten o'clock put them off the small town of Paola. One of the Caponis and two of the English ships had fallen by the way.

Also at ten o'clock, flying at ten thousand feet, five Breguets were crossing inland over the Gulf of Squillace, on the southeast side of the boot's sole. They had made that detour with the intention of avoiding the reported fog clouds at the Strait of Messina. Catanzaro, a town on the gulf, heard their passing at 10:10. The Breguet flight—good, big French ships—had all come through.

Then again at ten o'clock, pounding the air at better than one hundred and forty miles per hour, and higher than fifteen thousand feet, six Ansaldos were just reaching the tip of the Italian boot

over the high ridge between Reggio di Calabria, on the Strait side, and Bianco, on the east shore. They were above the Strait clouds, looking down on that moon flooded blanket of white fleece. Six Ansaldos! Six out of nine that had been eleven earlier in the day. One had gone down on Gozo Island, ten miles north of Malta. The pilot had made a good surf landing; while his eight mates winged low to see how he came out. He swam out, making shore.

Two more of the brave brood had made landings before Sicily was passed. One near Cape Passero, just reaching land by feet and inches. The remaining seven couldn't see his set-down. The third to fall by the way did just that—spun into the sea off Mt. Etna with a ship that was in flames. There was no hope for him—a Yank—and the six who carried on could not figure just what had happened. But those things will happen in air.

So that small, east shore town of Bianco heard motors going northward through the night. Bianco had the usual homeguard detail of semi-official listeners. People who were always on the lookout for raiding enemies. Bianco's semi-official ear stretchers went right into action and had the railroad dispatcher report, to the army southern department, that German motors had gone over.

Bianco knew that those motors were Hun engines. During the war every man-jack knew a German motor when he heard one. You know there was that characteristic throb of overlapped exhaust and propeller beat. It was different from any of the Allied aerial sounds. A man couldn't be mistaken. No matter if he was an airman, artilleryman, mud hen or civilian, he knew that German power plant when it sent down its sound. Bianco was sure. And Bianco was right in one thing: The dispatcher said that the enemy planes—yes, they were planes, Gothas!—were cutting directly for Naples. They'd just come in from the sea, and gone northwest.

Bianco's telegraphed report was the beginning of a great comedy of errors. A comedy of errors that turned into a tragedy of air. Now, it was hours and hours since Italy had first received news that three Zeppelins were going south across the Ægean Sea, down past Athens. The proper authorities had taken that report in hand; then they marked time waiting for something definite. Later, when Malta asked for help in the form of airplanes, the official buck was passed to the corps area of which Naples was headquarters. That Naples headquarters had wirelessed the southernmost flying field, in Catania, Sicily; and eleven Ansaldos went out.

Forthwith Italy forgot, taking it for granted that Malta was elected to receive the Germans. But that was the way during the war; the only thing of terrifying interest was the thing that was happening right now, right here. Furthermore, it isn't likely that more than a few spots in all Italy ever knew that a raid was to be expected. Communications were curtailed; and means of communication—even the newspapers—didn't get official dope till after that dope became past tense.

Bianco is east coast, and east coast in any country never knows what west coast is doing. The Bianco dispatch was sent up the east coast to the town marshal of Catanzaro. At almost the same time Catanzaro was listening to the roar of five French Breguets. And the good people of that city, knowing German motors, were dead sure that those engines up there in the sky belonged to the enemy.

Enemy planes coming in over Bianco!

Enemy planes flying, right now, over Catanzaro!

There was an alert field three kilometers northeast of Catanzaro. That field was manned by what was unofficially known as the Viggiano-American Group. Its personnel was Italian and Yank, under the patronage of Count Viggiano. The group was equipped with just about every type of pursuit plane

known to the Allied forces; English Sops and S.E.5's, French Nieuports and Morane-Saulniers, and a sprinkling of Italy's own fast ships. The count had a way of getting the best of equipment; and while his unit was fully official, it was also more or less free-and-easy. That is, it was made up of ex-frontline pilots in need of rest and a chance to forget. Sunny southern Italy was the place for both; and this chance to fly good ships was a treat.

It was too late for the Viggiano-American Group to get off the ground and shag the motors that were passing over Catanzaro. But they could, perhaps, intercept the enemy ships that had just cleared Bianco. So thinking, the Yank-Italian gang took the alert call, got busy and sent up four planes. Three were Morane-Saulniers. One was a Sopwith Camel. In good hands, all four ships were suited for night pursuit work; though the M-S monoplanes were pretty darned fast landers.

Having sent those four ships away, the field got busy on the telephone and called the Gulf of Manfredonia's alert field at Foggia. That was on the east coast also, and eighty miles from Naples. Getting the Foggia field, the Viggiano-American headquarters reported the two groups of enemy ships, making two landfalls on the east coast, and heading, obviously, for Naples or Rome. Perhaps both.

Now at about the same time the Foggia field's radio picked up a wireless flash from a coastwise ship that gave its position as sixty-five miles south of Naples, and well inshore. That vessel, also manned by men who know German motors when they heard them, reported that a group of Hun ships were running toward Naples. What they had seen, or heard, was the group of low-flying Capronis and English planes.

There were two other air fields, one north of Naples and the other south, that received hurry-up calls within that busy hour. And each field, being on the alert, sent up ships. In all, it was estimated that sixteen planes took the air to meet nineteen Allied ships that were duty bent in three northbound groups. Almost anything could happen; and just about everything did. Those scattered defenses of Italy's shoreline, while held down to the minimum in number of fighting personnel, were deadly effective. And in spite of all the outside drinking and playboy tendencies, those Italians and Yanks were always on call. Other emergencies had proven it; and this night's mess only added to that proof. Lucky for the nineteen duty-bound ships that Italy didn't have as many home-guard units as England.

As soon as the several air fields had sent their fast planes aloft they took it upon themselves to relay the alert dope to all the Naples area anti-aircraft and searchlight stations. Those stations, as was proven later, were deluged by warnings. As it was, even before the wild deluge, those Naples area stations were on the alert. They knew well enough that the Zeppelins were on the way. But they were holding their lights as a surprise accompaniment to their guns. They'd open both at the same time.

But now came a flood of news saying that enemy planes, as well as Zeppelins, were on the way. Whether or not the gun and light positions were ever advised that the Allied ships had left Malta has never been ascertained. It is likely that something really slipped there. It is just possible that the Italian and Malta brass hats, taking it for granted that the flight of planes would do the trick, had neglected to take those steps which would have told all men of arms, in the Naples district, that Allied planes would fill the air.

Then, again, it wasn't really expected that the Allied ships would ever get as far north as Naples. They, according to the dope, should have overtaken the Zeppelins some thirty or forty miles south of the big city. And with the job off their hands, the planes were to land at Salerno, at the head of the Gulf of Salerno. Salerno's air base had been

radioed by both Malta and the Italian war office to be ready with flood lights. Flood lights both on the water and their landing field, lights that would show the way for both land and water ships. And the base was to hold those lights, doused, till such time as the Zeppelin strafing had ended; or till such time as one or more of that Allied group signaled that they were coming in for a landing. What's more, Salerno was ready.

But Salerno, like the anti-aircraft and searchlight stations, began to receive all sorts of wild messages, via telephone and wireless. To make sure that the thing would be one messed-up mess, Fate saw to it that the Salerno base's commandant, Colonel Pizzo, was in Policastro that night. Policastro is seventy-five miles down the coast from Salerno. Colonel Pizzo, perhaps with a skinful of wine, was one of the first to telephone the base. He, too, was the kind of man who knew German motors when he heard them. And, said he to his subordinates at the base, these passing motors were not aboard the expected Zeppelins. They were in planes! Lots of enemy planes!

By eleven o'clock Salerno was a madhouse. The officer in acting command didn't know whether to shoot, shave or shag. So to make sure that no mistakes would remain unmade that night, the acting officers in command called all his flying men. Seven ships were sent up from that base—three land planes and four light flying boats. They were blocking the way against everything from the south.

ELEVEN o'clock! Three Zeppelins were about forty-five miles south of Naples. There were no lights showing in Naples, nor to the immediate south of that great city on the bay. And the time had arrived for Captain Ulm to give the word that would send his two co-workers out on their own. The *LZ-66* was to circle wide to the east, striking Naples fifteen minutes after the official time of the moon's setting. That meant 11:50. She was still cruising at seventeen thousand feet. That altitude was to be retained, for the wind had fallen off, leaving an almost dead calm. The three bombing officers had agreed that they had no windage problem.

The *LZ-57,* still high ship, was to cruise west. Then, at her altitude of eighteen thousand, she was to turn east and reach the Naples shorelines at 11:55. The two *LZ*'s were scheduled to meet and pass at about mid-city. The *LZ-66* would be delivering its old iron through the northern part of Naples while the *LZ-57* would take care of the southern precincts.

Captain Ulm, in his *L-201,* was to throttle his motors there, forty or forty-five miles south of the objective, and give the other ships a chance to move east and west around Naples. Then, still at his sixteen thousand feet elevation, he would come directly north. He, too, would time his arrival with the moon's setting.

At 11:10, when the three were off Agropoli, forty miles from Naples, Captain Ulm signaled the other two to move out on the business of the night. They went, and the *L-201* idled her six motors.

Also at 11:10, and from then on, the seven ships from the Salerno base stood out to sea from that city. The three land ships went up to fifteen thousand feet, spread out a bit, and flew at slightly different levels. The four seaplanes, as per agreement, patroled down below, at five, seven and ten thousand feet. Taking it all in all, the seven ships had the sky fairly well covered. And the sea they patroled was just about twenty miles south of Naples.

And the *LZ-66* was circling them, going miles to the east.

And the *LZ-57* was circling them, going miles to the west.

And the big *L-201* was marking time, stalling, fifteen miles to the south. Meanwhile, the moon was dropping to the horizon.

By then tragedy had been enacted to

the east and in the south. The four Viggiano-American ships, up from the field near Catanzaro, had spotted the six Ansaldos. That happened just after the six hurrying ships had turned west, a few miles below Catanzaro, intending to fly the railroad from the Gulf of Squillace to Nicastro on the west coast. Because of the biting cold, for which they were not dressed, the six Ansaldo pilots had dropped down to about seven thousand feet. Coming through the night, spitting sharp blue-green tongues of fire from their exhaust ports, the six Italian Ansaldos looked like as many German Fokkers.

In a night sky, the silhouettes of the two types were pretty much alike—thick through the motor section, each powered by a vertical-six engine, and much the same in length of fuselage and wing section. As for seeing the insignia of concentric circles on all the wings—well, a pilot would need far more light than the waning moon furnished at that time.

To the four men of the Italian-Yank unit the six ships in formation were just six almost obscure blots on a dark sky. They were lucky in finding them at all. Only the licking flash of those exhaust ports had made the thing possible. Moreover, the three M-S and one Sopwith Camel pilots had no reason to question the identity of these six. The alert said they were Germans. They were sent up to stop Germans. And if they were to do their job, now was the time to strike. And they struck!

They struck as one! And with that first dive, two Ansaldos fell. One went away in quick flames. The second just fell, spinning, no doubt with a dead man in the pit. The remaining four broke formation, wild, terrified. Something had struck them! Right there above their own territory! It was beyond man's comprehension to understand what it could be.

The four wheeled, dived and banked back toward the south. And the four Viggiano-American ships followed. They got a third Ansaldo, also in flames, just west of the small town of Squillace, on the gulf shore. It was then, and not till then, that the Viggiano-American flyers caught sight of the insignia upon which they were warring. There, before their wild eyes, was a ship burning, spinning flat, with all the fire centered at the motor and tanks. And on the wings, glistening bright in the red flood, were the tricolored cockades of Italian air.

One hundred and twenty-five miles north of this regrettable mess, over the small town of Polla in the foothills of the Apennines, another deadly passage at arms was being staged. Seven ships, up from the Foggia alert field, intercepted the five French Breguets that had passed inland over Catanzaro at 10:10. These seven Foggia planes were cutting cross-country intending to stop the coastwise flight that had been reported by the surface vessel sixty-five miles south of Naples. That the seven should stumble upon, and spot, the five Breguets was as uncanny and fateful a piece of wartime flying as was ever recorded. As with the unfortunate Ansaldo flight, the French Breguets presented silhouettes that were very much like the best known of Hun ships.

These Breguets, too, were thick through the motor bays, biplanes, and quite stubby in overall length. But again, the Foggia men were not out to study ships. Here was a business-like wedge of five coming through the night, and headed for Naples. The seven pounced upon the five. Two of the five, perhaps with dead pilots on the controls, crashed. Together, and bursting into flames, they spun groundward. And again, as in that mess down south, the French tricolored wing cockades flashed into view before the eyes of the Foggia pilots.

BEWILDERED, surprised and at a loss to know what had come down upon them, the remaining three Breguets made a turnabout. Their well flown mission was demoralized, ruined. Five

minutes later, above the Apennines, four more Foggia ships, jumped the three Breguets. These four Foggia planes were the four that had been dispatched to get these enemy planes.

Now they got them, all three. Two were burning in the air at the same time; and the third crashed down into the deep, narrow defile which carries the headwaters of the Bradana River. If the thing had been done in daytime, actual enemy against actual enemy, the mess could not have been more complete. That such a thing could take place in a night sky, that ships could find and destroy other ships in such manner, is almost past understanding. Surely, if the alert had been genuine, no such luck would have rewarded the Foggia—and Viggiano-American—efforts.

The moon was now close to the southwest horizon. It was just 11:30. Only five minutes of the mellow light remained. The *LZ-66* was marking time just northwest of Mt. Vesuvius, with Naples' shoreline plainly in view. Her motors were idled very low, just enough to hold her bow into the slight northwest breeze, and keep out the cold from the cooling systems of her engines. The bombing officer was at his post.

Offshore, half a dozen miles west of the great city, the *LZ-57* was in place. Her engines were in reverse, backing against that light breeze that was trying to carry her over the objective. Captain von Bulow and crew were close enough to catch an occasional light down there in the place of ordered darkness. His bombers were ready, too.

The *L-201,* intending to strike just after the others had criss-crossed Naples, had started her very slow flight north. Her six motors were turning almost noiselessly. Not a light showed. She was a ghost in the night. And the ghost was within a very few miles of the ships off Salerno when the third awful mess of the night came to pass.

There was that one field north of Naples that had been given the alert. They were using rotary-motored pursuit planes at that place. As was the way of rotary motors, the darned things wouldn't start when wanted worst and most. Four ships had been quickly trundled to the starting line. One motor, the only one of the four to fire at all, backfired, setting a puddle of fuel aflame. Quickly that ship was jerked back and the fire extinguished; but the craft was out of the flight. Then, with mechanics sweating and cussing, the other three motors were hand wound till the devil wouldn't have them. They'd kick and spit, sneeze and sputter, but never a run from any one of the three. And time was passing. Those enemy planes—the Italian Capronis and English flying boats—were getting closer and closer to Naples. So the Italian macs hand wound and cussed some more.

Just a few minutes before 11:30 the three devilish rotary motors got together on the thing, decided that they'd quit fogging-up on the damp night air and take the stuff, as is, for combustion mixture. So deciding, the funny motors went off with a bang—all three at about the same time—and ran as if they'd only been fooling.

The three pilots climbed out of that field, hitting for the south. The moon was just passing from view. A few miles' flight brought the flying three over Naples. They were very low above the big dark city. Fact is, they were hardly above the buildings; and the bark of their engines filled the quiet night. The three showed no lights.

Engines in the night—and over the city!

Every searchlight in the Naples area sprang into life. They flashed and lashed the dark sky. Sharp fingers of light swung high and low; and all that illumination was directly above the city that had been in hiding for hours. The lights—half a dozen of them at one time—found the flight of three Italian planes. The glare of those powerful searchlights blinded the low flying pilots. To save their own necks those three flyers broke

formation, wheeled and dodged here and there like crazy bats suddenly entering a crazy hell.

Captain von Bulow, looking down from his *LZ-57,* laughed.

Captain Freytag, in the *LZ66,* must have done the same.

Some of the men on the searchlight positions saw their big mistake and killed their lights. But two powerful ones, on the bay shore south of Naples, continued to hold the three ships as best they could. And they were doing a fine, deadly job. They kept the long fingers of light right smack on the speeding planes as long as those piercing rays could reach the southbound ships. That meant that the three were several miles south of Naples before the boneheads on the two lights realized that a mistake had been made.

But Captain Ulm, then only twenty miles south of the city, had followed the doings with great interest. Not only had he seen all the lights flash across the Naples sky, but he'd also picked up the three small ships that were trying to get away from the last of those lights. And the lookout atop the *L-201,* keen-eyed Hun, had seen more. That lookout telephoned down that there were cruising airplanes just half a dozen miles ahead. The ships off Salerno.

The *L-201* was at sixteen thousand feet then, with all hands wrapped warmly in their great coats of fur. And she was cruising slowly north. So there were airplanes ahead, and plenty of lights and guns waiting at Naples? With a happy laugh, Captain Ulm dropped much of his water ballast. Up went the great *L-201.* Twenty thousand feet came to the dial of her altimeter. Five minutes later, with her motors unheard by the pilots who sat behind hellishly noisy motors down below, the *L-201* was passing above the miles of air patrolled by the ships below.

But those men up from Salerno had also seen the play of the big lights to the north. And they had seen the three ships hurrying south. Moreover, the Salerno men knew that another mistake might be made if any one or all three of the oncoming pilots should stumble upon them in the dark. Something had to be done, and right then. So the leader of the Salerno group pulled his Very pistol and fired a flare. He was right on time, too, for the searchlight-baited three had won much altitude and were barging right in among the cruising offshore planes.

AGAIN Captain Ulm had reason to laugh. He was fully ten thousand feet above the highest of those Italian ships; and never a white ray of that calcium flare reached his craft. Onward went the long *L-201.* And under the Very flare milling ships recognized one another's insignia. Then, even as the crew of the long raider looked down and had its laugh, the flight of Capronis and English ships winged in from the south. The Caproni bombers were high. They were, of course, coming bow on, with no way of showing their wing or tail markings. A few of the Salerno ships, capable of the climb, had shot up above the ten thousand foot level; and the Capronis, flying wide now, were at that elevation.

The Very flare dimmed, then went out. Its light left the dark sky before the ships out of the south could reach the milling throng and be recognized. The Salerno land planes struck the great two-motored Italian Capronis, thinking that they had German Gothas before them. Again the quick similarity of Gotha and Caproni was too much for keyed-up men who had no time to think or figure, stop, look or listen.

Down lower the three ships from the north-of-Naples field had joined with the Salerno seaplanes in an attack on the English boats. High and low, in both milling groups, there were many exchanges of machine gun fire. But the moonless darkness saved the situation. That is, it saved the situation for all but one Caproni. A chance shot found that ship's fuel tank, and it went seaward

in the red. But the tired flyers out of the south, like their Breguet and Ansaldo mates, were completely disrupted at the last, critical moment. To save themselves from that mess of mad bunglers they were forced to fly in every direction but the right direction. And the minute of minutes was on the dial for Naples.

The Captains Freytag and Von Bulow weren't missing any bets. The flood of searchlights told them what they were up against. Without delay, each ship dropped water ballast and went to a new altitude. The *LZ-66* reached twenty-one thousand feet; and Captain von Bulow sent his *LZ-57* even higher than that, to twenty-four thousand feet. While that lightening of ship was under way, the ships were too. Freytag and Von Bulow knew what every officer and man on those Italian searchlights knew: that there'd be the devil to pay for the great blunder made.

Right at that minute, when all the lights had been finally doused, the Hun captains knew that there was much rapid Italian chatter being swapped down below. Also, that the well known, universal army buck was being passed. On top of all that, and because of all that, the airship captains knew that the Italians would be mighty careful—for the next few minutes—to avoid making the same mistake.

It was the time to strike. There'd be so much commotion at the searchlight and anti-aircraft positions that nobody would have eyes and ears for the sky. When a group of Italians are waving their hands and yelling overlapping sentences they have no time for anything except that. So guessing, the high Zeppelins moved east and west over Naples. Tons of bombs had fallen, and fires had actually started in the city, before the fanning searchlights again cut the clear sky. The *LZ-66* was halfway across the city when the first light hit and held it; and the *LZ-57*, going east, had made like progress.

Then the anti-aircraft guns tore the night wide open. The sky in which the raiders worked was filled with bursting shrapnel; and the stuff was coming close. In spite of their great altitude, it took a stiff upper lip to carry on with the business of bombing, when the Captains Freytag and Von Bulow might have dropped the works, at random—water, bombs, even fuel—and shot still higher for far greater altitude. The extreme altitude, however, was becoming a drawback. Already, aboard both ships, men were down and out for want of air to breathe. Those fortunate enough to have the tanks close were working on oxygen. For all, the cold was numbing, punishing. But the raid was on, and men could forget personal handicaps for the time being.

At 11:55, with the bay almost reached, Captain Freytag took a telephone call from his second in command, at the time stationed within the bag, saying that the ship had been riddled, aft, by shrapnel. Two hydrogen cells were leaking badly, and the fuel line to the aft portside motor had been cut. That engine was dead. The ship was sinking.

That might not be so bad. The *LZ-66* must work to a much lower level pretty soon. It was too cold, and the air too rare, to make a sustained flight at that altitude; for, with the loss of bomb weight, the ship had gone to twenty-six thousand feet. And the *LZ-57*, for the same reason, was close to thirty thousand feet, with all hands living from their oxygen tanks by then. And all engines as good as useless, hardly turning.

The anti-aircraft guns and searchlights, dividing honors, were fanning and peppering the west and east skies above Naples. Into and across the vacant central sky sailed the *L-201*. Ulm had his ship at thirty thousand feet. His motors, not having superchargers, were starved to death. Two had stopped. The other four furnished about as much power as office fans. But in the dead cold of that great altitude, the ships

found little or no wind; so power, for the time being, was the least of their worries.

As the *L-201* dropped its great load of bombs, it also valved off hydrogen, against still greater altitude. And not a light or gun questioned that northward passage. So far so good, or even better than that. Captain Ulm had not dropped his whole load. Originally Rome too had been on the schedule; but that headwind during the afternoon had put Rome out of the picture. Now, with Rome erased, Captain Ulm decided to do a turnabout and give Naples the whole works, every last bomb in the racks and bomb room. The thing seemed so safe—so easy!

Captain Ulm, however, made a few miscalculations. A ship at thirty thousand feet or better comes near to being right above a spot on the ground that's mapped as being eight or ten miles away. Such a spot on the ground was Aversa, a large town of twenty-three thousand population some ten miles north of Naples. Aversa's lights and guns were manned by crews from the air field that had sent out the fatal three pursuit planes. The Aversa crews had held their fire, and kept all lights and searchlights dark. But now, with the almost powerless *L-201* making a sluggish turn midway between Naples and Aversa, things began to happen. Aversa slapped three powerful searchlights on the *L-201*.

At that exact second the long ship was nosed due west, slowly working around to bring Naples under her bow, and bombs, again. She was, for all practical purposes, a stationary target. And the Aversa gunners were very practical, and with one purpose.

Before the lights had stopped blinding the surprised Germans, the third Aversa gun to fire had sent a shell through one of the *L-201's* hydrogen cells. Fortunately the fused nose of that shell met with nothing more solid than fabric and gas; but the cell was ruined. And the men of the long raider knew that they were nicely spotted by that high angle fire that was getting thicker and thicker.

With the third ship so brightly framed in the north sky more lights and guns swung away from the fleeing *LZ-66* and *LZ-57*. Those two raiders had passed beyond danger, but the third member was cold meat.

Hot meat! Three minutes after the first searchlight had found and held the *L-201*, a direct hit—on her solid catwalk, midships—had turned the great Zeppelin into a falling ball of fire. Her war was over.

Naples, by then, had no reason to keep her lights doused. She was brightly lighted by half a dozen major conflagrations. Docks and railroad sheds were burning. The gas works waved a high, red torch in the night. The arsenal and many factories had been hit. It had been a large party.

Meanwhile the *LZ-66* was in trouble. She had circled a few miles out over the bay, then started east. She was home bound and in a hurry. Her damage was great and she was sinking all the way. Every means of lightening ship was resorted to; but Captain Freytag's only ambition was to clear Italy, get her out over the Adriatic Sea and drop her on the water. Once there, he'd have a chance to be picked up by some lurking U-boat. Zeppelins had done that before. Already, as they swung in that direction, the ship's wireless was working along those lines. Only ten thousand feet were under the *LZ-66* as she cleared the Apennines and sighted Adriatic shore cities.

The *LZ-57*, in occasional contact with the stricken *LZ-66*, cruised a few miles north of the Freytag ship. Captain von Bulow had escaped whole skinned. He still kept his craft at fifteen thousand feet, having dropped to that altitude for the comfort of his crew and the sake of his starved motors. Von Bulow was prepared to stand by in the event that the *LZ-66* should need him, an eventuality that might come to pass if the Adriatic

was safely reached and landed upon. The *LZ-57* might even take the crew of the other Zeppelin aboard. At any rate, Captain von Bulow would be along with the *LZ-66* till all hope had passed.

ALL hope had just about passed for three Ansaldo and two Breguet pilots who had met somewhere over southeastern Italy. The fuel supplies that had taken them from Malta, through friend-made hell, and to their present location, were just about exhausted. Batting along through the dark, with all idea of direction lost, the five ships had met and rounded into a formation, with a common cause. That common cause was to locate some likely landing place. The thing seemed almost hopeless.

Then the Foggia field, knowing that its small pursuit ships must be nearing the end of their fuel supplies, had begun to flash its signal beacon. The five, some ten or fifteen miles south of Foggia at the time, had turned toward that beacon as a drowning man is said to start for a straw. That beacon, to them, was something; and it was a long time since they'd had anything but doubt and hell.

But before Foggia's beacon could be reached the five pilots had sighted the fires of Naples. They had their own necks to save, but wartime airmen were turned from brave stock. The five started for the place where things seemed to be happening—Naples. Maybe they were too late. Perhaps the show was over. But as long as they had a single drop of fuel they were still on mission. At any rate, on time or too late, there'd be light by which to land in the Naples area. Just as well end the horrible night there as anywhere.

Above the town of Troja, on the Adriatic slope of the dark Apennines, the leader of the five caught sight of something between his small group and the fires on the west coast. What he saw was the few lights that flickered in the hull of the *LZ-66*. The belly shutters of the sinking craft were open; and frantic Huns worked by those dim lights, trying to tear loose everything that could be pulled out and dropped. They were busy at the bomb dropping apparatus when sighted; and the leader of the five signaled his mates. They knew, right then, that the night wasn't going to be chalked up as a total loss—for them. Here was one of the things they'd gone through hell to reach; and now they'd reach it, and reach it right!

New life must have come to the five who had died a thousand deaths during the past hour or so. Their altitude was the altitude of the sinking enemy. Eight thousand feet by then. Their action must be rapid, immediate, for any moment might find their motors conking, one after the other, for want of fuel. Into the fray, attacking the *L-201* bow-on and to both sides, they winged. The outlook atop the airship was the first one to signal the control car that danger was at hand. The outlook, telephoning, never finished his tardy warning. He died with enemy lead in him, dangling from the topside platform by the length of his safety belt. The machine gunner at his side carried on; and the attacking Ansaldo dropped away with its propeller shattered, motor dead and fuel tank leaking.

The four remaining Allied ships had done damage throughout the long raider. Now they wheeled out of the first rush and dive, flew quick circling turns—*veraging* like four men gone mad—and returned to the attack. That attack was met by the machine guns in every gondola of the *L-201*. And Captain Freytag, knowing that four flying men could manage to keep his ship always in sight, fired a flare to help his own machine gunners keep the enemy always in view. There in the white calcium glare the milling mess attacked and was attacked.

Captain von Bulow's crew looked down from the *LZ-57*. Seldom, even during that war where so many Zeppelin's had gone down before the Allied airplanes, had one ship's crew been called

upon to witness hell visited upon their mates of the lighter-than-air service.

Seldom did that happen. But *never* before had the thing happened that was about to happen then. Never before had a Zeppelin deliberately gone into action against airplanes. Captain von Bulow was valving off. His wheel and elevator men were flying the *LZ-57* down. The dog fight below was coming closer and closer; or, rather, they were getting nearer and nearer to that patch of bad sky.

Captain von Bulow could hope to do only one thing—cover the *LZ-66* to portside and cut the attack on her by half. That is, take on half of the enemy's attack for his own craft; and give the *LZ-66* some chance to work ship and beat off the planes by machine gun fire. There was just a thin chance that the thing might be done. Machine guns had a very bad habit of jamming. There was always that element of luck; and the Zeppelins outgunned the planes by many pieces. As the *LZ-57* came into the fray, though the Germans did not know it, another of the Ansaldos was pulling away from the action. The pilot had jammed guns.

Three planes then took up the merciless punishment where there had been five. Freytag had dead men in two engine gondolas. A dead radio operator there at his feet in the control car. And the helmsman, white and drooping, stood his wheel in spite of a bullet that had arrived with his number on it.

The *LZ-57* came alongside. The *LZ-66* was at five thousand feet. Freytag then relieved the dying man on the wheel, better to hold the stricken craft safely on her course and clear of the covering *LZ-57*. Side by side, with hardly a hundred feet standing between them, the two airships pushed on. Fought on! Worked ship, and made of the thing an epic try. Never a thought of surrender; never a notion to put those two great ships down in enemy territory, for enemy possession. And that would have been so easy! So easy to go on living, now that certain destruction seemed so close. Other Zeppelins had surrendered—in France and in England—and it's remarkable to think that Freytag never made a sign toward the striking of his colors.

THE end came for Captain Freytag and his entire crew just about five miles east of the point of first attack. By then the *LZ-66* was riddled from bow to rudders. Not a hydrogen cell remained intact. Three motors were running full power, with three engine men dead. In the control car, only Freytag and one other man—the next in command, who was handling the elevators—remained on their feet. The rest were dead or dying. Communications from within the ship, and from the other telephone stations, no longer came to the control car. It was a ship of death. A ship that had been on borrowed time too long.

The *LZ-57* was hard hit, too. Death was aboard her by then. Two of her motors were running free, full gun, the engineers gone west. Captain von Bulow's first officer, Lieutenant Dobrich, sat back against the thin wall of the wireless cabin, a strange expression on his dead face. Another man had died at the elevators. What had happened back in the hull Captain von Bulow could not know, or guess. But Von Bulow had taken care to station three men, with cable cutters, alongside the suspended, heavy fuel tanks. They were ready for action, waiting.

The *LZ-66* burst into flames! In a flash she was red from end to end. That searing heat turned the attacking planes. The rush and flash of flame nearly took a Breguet that was abeam the *LZ-66*, giving its rear pit gunner a chance to rake the long craft broadside. The big Breguet, with pilot and gunner singed and wings a-smoke, fell away in a spin. And now, never quitting, the two remaining planes turned to the *LZ-57*. Maybe they could top her off before she'd get away.

But Von Bulow, with that first hot flash of fire, had dropped the last of his water ballast. Quickly, taking the signal from the control car, the cable cutters had dropped every fuel tank they could reach. The starboard side of the *LZ-57* was smoking; and the lightening of ship was hardly enough to get her away from the thin, hot air of that area. But, after hovering there for deadly seconds—which seemed like ages—she began to take altitude.

Von Bulow's crew worked like madmen. Even the dead were tossed from windows and through belly shutters. All things that could be dropped were dropped. It was the usual frantic procedure so common to lighter-than-air fighters. And by the time the *LZ-57* had won enough altitude to leave the slower climbing planes behind, her fuel supply had been reduced to such an extent that a return to the home base was out of the question. Such a flight, even taking a direct course with all its dangers from Balkan enemies, would have meant a trip of at least six hundred miles. The next best thing, and the only remaining possibility, was a northward, mountain hop to Hungary. That was close to four hundred miles, a long journey under the circumstances. But the *LZ-57* was light; and they were making her lighter.

Moreover, Captain von Bulow felt sure that his damaged hydrogen cells were being put in order by his crew. There was just a chance that the *LZ-57* would win through. A try was going to be made, at any rate.

The try was made. The airplanes, flying on the last few liters of fuel, were not able to follow. From an altitude of eighteen thousand feet, ten minutes after the *LZ-66* had gone down, Captain von Bulow watched what was left of the attackers sliding down into the light flooded field near Foggia. For the time being the *LZ-57* was out of danger.

Dawn found her with the Adriatic put behind her; and two hundred miles of the trip had been made. She was high. Twenty thousand feet had been her altitude for hours. That was her level to the end. And at the end, after a remarkable flight, Captain von Bulow put his ship over the Hungary border. She landed thirty miles south of Lake Balaton, out of fuel.

It was rough, unpleasant country. There was a fair wind blowing. The *LZ-57* whipped herself to pieces there in a field, but the crew that brought her home lived to tell about it. And the *LZ-57*, at least, did not fall into enemy hands.

Italy, perhaps, had been punished; but the affair had been very costly for Imperial Germany.

A Story of the Sea

STEAM TRAINED

By W. TOWNEND

MR. HARRINGTON, chief engineer of the S.S. *Hibiscus*, tilted back in his chair and lighted his pipe. Between puffs he said:

"Don't you run away with the idea that steam's finished. It isn't. All the same, I'm no bigot. I'm willing to acknowledge other methods of propelling ships through blue water."

"Diesel motors, electricity and—and what?" I said.

"Sail," said Mr. Harrington with a grim relish.

"And what do *you* know about sail?"

"Not much," said Mr. Harrington. "But once—" He broke off abruptly, wrinkled his lean, leathery face, half shut his deepset eyes and sucked at his pipe. "Did you ever hear tell of the old *Coleraine?*" he said presently.

"No," I said. "What about her?"

"You never heard of that voyage the *Coleraine* made from Port Said to Falmouth a year or so after the war?"

"No. Were you on board?"

"Was I on board?" said Mr. Harrington. "What a question to ask! Of course I was. And we had a skipper who belonged to sail and had no use for steam —and said so whenever he saw me."

"Sounds promising," I said. "But what were you doing in the *Coleraine?*

I thought you went from the *Hydrangea* direct to the *Hibiscus?*"

"That's so," said Mr. Harrington, "but the *Hydrangea* was making a trip from New York to Calcutta when word reached us I was to return home to go as chief in the *Hibiscus,* then building at Gateshead. Kiralfy, the ship's agent, told me I was to take a passage on board some steamer, but I'd have to wait maybe ten days, kicking my heels and doing nothing but drink bad liquor and get into mischief generally. I wasn't pleased and I said so.

"Next day a message was brought me. Would I come to the office at once. I went and found Kiralfy talking to a large old duck with stiff gray hair and a hard, solemn face and sour eyes and a swollen nose.

" 'Mr. Harrington,' said Kiralfy, 'this here is Captain Inchreed who is been sent out from England with two mates and three engineers to take the *Coleraine* home, and his chief engineer has in hospital gone with fever. The *Coleraine* is been laying here a long time,' Kiralfy said, 'and Captain Inchreed's owners is bought her. If you was to go home with Captain Inchreed you was saving time and money. Was you go?'

"I said sure I'd go. And then Captain Inchreed said in a flat, bad tempered voice—

" 'I got to tell you, Mister, I don't like engineers.'

" 'Oh!' I said. 'So you don't like engineers! Well, get your damn ship to move without 'em then!'

"Kiralfy stopped me as I was going out the door.

" 'Captain Inchreed,' he said, 'Mr. Harrington's right what he says. You can't get your ship home without no chief engineer.'

"So I signed on. I've not seen many ship's engines that were in a worse state than the *Coleraine's,* but Horan, the second engineer, said they were a joy to behold compared with what they'd been three weeks before. He told me that a bigger drawback than the *Coleraine's* engines was the *Coleraine's* captain. I asked him why was that. He said he looked on engineers as the dregs of the earth. He said the steward was scared of him; so was the second mate. I asked was the mate. Horan said there wasn't a mate. He'd gone on the booze with the Old Man in Cairo and had not come back.

" 'Then we need a mate?' I said.

" 'Yes,' Horan said, 'we do and till we get one we'll stay where we are.'

"That afternoon when I went on deck for a breath of fresh air a thin, quiet looking young man in a white linen suit and a straw hat asked if I could tell him where he could find the captain. I said:

" 'You're not from this side the Atlantic, I bet.'

"He wasn't. He came from someplace in Massachusetts, Cape Cod way, near Provincetown, and he wanted to get home. I showed him the Old Man standing by the entrance to the saloon alleyway, talking to the steward, and he went to him and said.

" 'I hear you're in need of a mate, sir. Mr. Kiralfy said maybe you'd take me. My name's Carter.'

" 'Master's ticket?' said the Old Man.

" 'License we call it; yes, sir,' said Carter.

" 'I may as well say now as later,' said the Old Man, 'I don't like Americans. Sail trained?'

" 'No, sir; steam. I was second officer of the *Northern Range,*' young Carter said, 'when I was taken bad with blood poisoning and sent to hospital on shore. There won't be one of the Range line steamers along for another month. I'd be willing to work my passage, sir.'

"I saw the Old Man's eyes light up at that and I knew that if he signed young Carter on he'd pocket the money he ought to have paid him and be that much up on the deal.

" 'I don't like liner officers,' he said. 'They don't know their job, and steam training's useless. I'll take you, though. I'll have to. Go and get your gear.'

"NEXT day, late, the hands who'd been signed on at noon came on board. A more horrible, good-for-nothing gang of cutthroats, dope fiends, jailbirds and beachcombers you never saw. Wasters, all of them, that the chief of police at Port Said had wanted to get rid of. A tough crowd and a bad crowd. We'd have trouble before we got home, I was sure. I was right. We had it in ten minutes, with frills on.

"Young Carter fell out with one of the sailors, a man called Marks—a tall, lean man with a dead white face and shifty eyes. He was drinking from a bottle that didn't have milk in it, and the mate told him to hand it over *pronto*.

" 'Like hell I will!' Marks said.

"The mate grabbed the bottle and threw it overboard. Marks aimed a blow at his face. The mate hit him in the body and laid him out. He got to his feet and said—

" 'I'll pay you for that, Mister Mate.'

" 'Don't yap,' said the mate. 'Get for'ard!'

"And then Captain Inchreed came out of the saloon and said, kind of fierce and hot:

" 'Mr. Carter, never let me see you striking one of the crew again. I don't like brutality and I won't have it.'

" 'Very good, sir,' said the mate and walked away.

"The Old Man looked at me, under his eyebrows, as if he'd just seen some horrible insect, and said:

" 'That kind of thing don't do here, Mr. Harrington. That man the mate hit will give trouble. Care for a drink, Mister? I got some good whisky.'

"I said no. I'd too much responsibility down below. I said the less any of us drank the better. We weren't friends from then on, though we kept up a kind of pretense for appearance's sake, at first, anyway, and in the saloon where I had my meals with him and the mate and the wireless operator.

"Here's something that will make you laugh. We'd a wireless operator but no wireless. The *Coleraine's* wireless installation had gone to pieces in the two years the ship had been laid up and nothing young Sparks could do or say would get it to work. And so they'd given us leave to proceed on our voyage, and young Sparks became a kind of passenger and did nothing except enjoy life. He was a nice enough boy who knew more than he let on, in that respect being the exact opposite of the Old Man, who was too damn ignorant to know how little he really did know. Almost every time we sat down to a meal he'd say, kind of mournful—

" 'The sea's not been the same since sail passed.'

"Once I said:

" 'You can't put back the clock, Captain Inchreed.'

" 'And who wants to?' he said. 'Not me. Progress is a law of nature. But,' he said, 'show me the progress at sea! Engines are better, I daresay, but the men are worse. The men we had in the old days were sailors. The men we have now aren't.'

" 'You're sail trained, Captain Inchreed,' I said. 'You're living in the past.'

" 'If I am,' he said, 'I'm proud of it.'

"You couldn't talk to a man like that. He was hog headed. He drank too much whisky. He looked down on me because I was only an engineer; he looked down on the mate because he was steam trained. The second mate and the second and third engineers he wasn't aware existed. The steward he made a pal of. The hands he was scared of. Why? I couldn't imagine. It didn't make sense. Old time sailing ship skippers, whatever they were or weren't, were never the kind of men to let their crews frighten 'em. Why, then, should Captain Inchreed be so soft?

"I wasn't the only one who couldn't understand what was wrong with him. One hot night when we were plugging away at our usual six and a half knots, the mate came to my room soon after eight. He seemed a bit put out.

" 'Mr. Harrington,' he said, 'what do you make of this? About an hour ago I was in the chartroom. I heard some one in the Old Man's bedroom. I knew the Old Man was in the saloon boozing with the steward and so,' he said, 'I went in to see who was there. I found Marks going through a drawer of the bureau and asked him what the hell he was doing. He said he was sick and wanted some medicine. I told him to beat it,' the mate said, 'and he gave me some lip and I kicked him out on to the lower bridge. Then I went to the saloon and fetched the Old Man, and would you believe it—he took Marks's part and said of course he was sick! Queer, ain't it? Do you know what it is, Mr. Harrington? He's scared.'

" 'Of Marks?' I said.

" 'Of Marks and all the rest of the focsle hands,' the mate said. 'Can you beat it?'

"He sat and talked with me all through the first watch. I liked him. As a rule no Englishman ever really likes an American. No American ever likes an Englishman. But young Carter was the kind of man I defy you to help liking. You didn't want to say anything that would hurt his feelings, even in fun.

"At seven bells I said—

" 'Don't you ever sleep, Mr. Carter?'

"He laughed and said:

" 'The less I sleep on board this packet the better. The lock on my door was broken last night.'

" 'As bad as all that?' I said.

" 'I'm not afraid,' he said.

"At one bell he said it was time to go. I went on deck with him. Eight bells sounded on the bridge. I heard the second mate say—

" 'Mr. Carter, the wheel hasn't been relieved.'

"I didn't hear what the mate said in reply, because the donkeyman came to me and said—

" 'The third engineer told me to tell you the firemen due on watch haven't shown up.' "

Here Mr. Harrington uttered a little laugh.

"Well?" I said.

"Times have changed," he said. "You wouldn't get a scrap now on board ship—not once in two years. Humanity's getting itself civilized, even at sea. But the hands we'd signed on at Port Said were tough and bad. We went for'ard, the mate, the second engineer, myself and the bosun. The firemen were with the sailors in the sailors' focsle, waiting. They wouldn't come out when we asked them.

" 'Come and get us,' they said.

" 'Some one put out the light and we fought in the dark. A fireman tried to knife me. Sparks arrived with a hurricane lamp. That saved my life. The mate laid him out with a smack on the jaw. Not Sparks, the man who was trying to knife me. We cleared the focsle and got the hands out on to the foredeck.

" 'Next time the watch isn't relieved on the tick,' the mate said, 'you stiffs will be feeling sorrier for yourselves than you are now. D'you understand?' he said. And Marks said to him:

" 'Mister, you wait. I'm warning you. Wait.'

"That was enough. The mate hit him in the face and he dropped flat on his back.

" 'Get up!' the mate said. 'Get up!'

"Marks got up and rushed and the mate sidestepped and then set to work to smash him. Considering the only glimmer of light came from young Sparks' hurricane lamp, it was as pretty a bit of fighting as I've ever seen. And when at last Marks was sitting huddled up against the No. 1 hatch coaming, whimpering he was killed, the mate said:

" 'You're hurt, are you? Good! I meant to hurt you. Get up or I'll hurt you again. Jump to it, you swine, or I'll use my boots on you.'

"For a steam trained mate young Carter was certainly useful in a free-for-all. He could hit like a poem.

"When we reached the bridge deck the Old Man was waiting for us, fair shaking with rage.

" 'Mr. Carter,' he said, 'didn't I warn you I wouldn't have violence on board my ship? Don't you understand these men aren't seafaring men in the ordinary sense of the word?' he said. 'Can't you make them obey you without losing your temper?'

" 'Captain Inchreed,' said the mate, 'I'm as mild tempered a man as any one else, but I'll let no focsle hand treat me as you'd let me be treated without putting him in his place. I'm fed up. And if this is the way you Britishers run your ships, God help you!'

"NEXT day things went wrong in the engineroom."

"The firemen?" I asked.

"Firemen? No—the air pump. What happened was, the rod broke. The ship was stopped and we made a temporary repair by putting a stud in the rod. Directly the ship was under way again I went to the Old Man and told him he'd have to put in to the nearest port. He couldn't believe his ears.

" 'What the devil are you talking about?' he said.

" 'We can't risk the voyage home unless we get a new rod for the air pump made in the shops ashore,' I said.

"He saw I meant it and said—

" 'Why can't you look after your damned engines?'

" 'Not my damned engines!' I said. 'If you want the ship to get to the Tyne you'd better do as I say.'

"And so that was why at six o'clock that same evening the old *Coleraine* crawled into Algiers and that was why an hour or so later there wasn't a deckhand or fireman on board. Port Said or no Port Said, Algiers was a good makeshift. Those roughnecks were home."

"How do you mean, home?" I said.

Mr. Harrington grinned.

"Listen, and you'll hear. Three mornings later—three, I think, though it might have been more—Horan came to my room where I was still in my bunk. He perched himself on the washstand and looked at me and laughed.

" 'Mr. Harrington,' he said, 'our orphans have left us.'

" 'What are you talking about?' I said.

" 'The hands,' he said. 'Every mother's son of 'em. Every fireman, trimmer and sailor has gone ashore for keeps. Also the cook.'

" 'As regards the cook,' I said, 'good.'

"I got out of my bunk and put some clothes on and went on deck. The mate was leaning over the rail amidships.

" 'Is it true?' I said.

" 'It's the truest thing you ever knew,' he said.

"The Old Man came down the ladder from the lower bridge. He was puffy about the eyes and white and not quite sober. He stood looking first at the mate and then at me, like he didn't know which was which. He wore red-and-white striped pajamas. The jacket was unbuttoned and you could see his round white belly. He said:

" 'Your fault, Mr. Carter. If you treated the hands halfway right they wouldn't have bolted. Why don't they teach you steamboat mates some sense?'

" 'You'd say it, wouldn't you?' said the mate.

"Breakfast over, the Old Man went ashore. Teatime he was back, well oiled. There was no sign of the crew, he said, and he'd been into every bar in Algiers, making inquiries. The police could have rounded 'em up, if they'd wanted to, he said, but they weren't troubling. He was ruined, he said, and all through a fool of a steamboat mate who thought he could bully the hands and get away with it.

"Three long, hot, miserable days passed. There wasn't a sign of the missing hands. They'd gone. What was more, it wasn't possible to sign on any more in their place. There'd been a comb-out in Algiers and the port was bare of beachcombers and deadbeats.

The mate came to me and said:

" 'Mr. Harrington, I'm desperate. I'm half out of my mind. I can't wait here any longer. I've got to get home.'

"I didn't ask what was the matter, but I knew it was something serious. He looked ten years older than when he'd first come on board the *Coleraine* at Port Said.

" 'What I can't understand is,' I said, 'where the crowd have hidden themselves, or how?'

" 'Didn't you hear?' he said. 'They went to Marseilles as part of the crew of a French packet that had been laid up here a couple of months with boiler trouble.'

" 'Does the Old Man know?' I said.

" 'I don't think so,' he said. 'The ship chandler told me as a secret. The way things are I guess we'll be here till Christmas. I've got to get home.' And then he said, 'Mr. Harrington, let's take the ship to England ourselves. Listen,' he said, 'why not? There's the Old Man, myself and the second mate; you, the second engineer and the third; the donkeyman, the steward, Sparks, the bosun and the carpenter. Will you back me up?'

" 'Sure I'll back you up,' I said.

"We got the second mate, the second engineer and the third and Sparks, and asked if they'd make the trip. We asked the bosun and carpenter and donkeyman. We asked the steward. One and all of 'em said they were willing, if we were. They'd try it, at least. Anything was better than being eaten alive in Algiers harbor in mid-July. Anything.

"We went to the Old Man the minute he came on board, oiled, as usual, but not so oiled he wasn't sober the instant the mate said we were going to take the *Coleraine* to the Tyne without any deckhands or firemen. He listened and then he said:

" 'If it's any comfort to you, Mr. Carter, you've ruined me. I've had a wire from the owners that's just about finished me. Take the ship where you like and be damned. And now get to hell out of my room and let me be.'

" 'Thank you, sir,' said the mate. 'We'll make better time short handed than we'd have made with those hoodlums that are drinking themselves to death in Marseilles.'

" 'What d'you mean, Marseilles?' said the Old Man.

"The mate explained. The Old Man said nothing. He was beyond speech.

"NEXT morning early the pilot came on board and the *Coleraine* left Algiers, bound for England, manned by a crew of eleven. But after we'd been at sea a matter of twelve hours or so we were only ten. The Old Man never once set foot on the bridge after we passed Oran. He shut himself up in his quarters on the lower bridge and soaked.

"As soon as we were through the Straits we got the wind on our beam and we rolled. We rolled worse than I've ever known a ship roll, almost. And with only four of us down below, three engineers and the donkeyman, two to a watch, four hours on, four off, it was a hard graft. On a four-hour watch two men had to feed nine furnaces in the stokehold and get coal from the bunkers, clean three fires and keep steam up somehow, and in the engineroom do all the oiling, looking after the pumps, the dynamo, the fan, the main engines and Lord knows what else! Some job, believe me!'

"One morning when we were abreast of the Burlings I went up on deck and met the mate who, like me, had just come off watch. He looked fit enough, but tired. We sat on the No. 3 hatch in the sun and drank our coffee and ate our hardtack and talked.

" 'Where's the Old Man?' I said.

" 'Drunk as usual, I guess,' the mate said.

" 'Oh, is he!' some one said. 'Well, he isn't.' We turned and there was the Old Man, showing his teeth like an angry dog. 'You make me sick, the two of you.' His face was the color of a dead

codfish; his eyes were bleary and red; his nose was pink. 'Mr. Carter,' he said, 'you've lost me my job. My one chance thrown away, all through you. I ought to have stayed in sail. What do you know about sail? You're ignorant.' I knew then how hopeless the Old Man really was. 'What encouragement is there for a sailor these days on board a steamboat?' he said.

" 'None,' I said. 'It's the engineer who's the important one now, Captain Inchreed; don't you agree?'

"That night I had the twelve to four watch in my bunk. I was tired. I was fast asleep the moment I lay down. Yet in half an hour, or less, I was in the engineroom as wide awake as ever I'd been in my life. The second engineer who'd done all that was necessary was waiting for me on the front platform.

" 'We're finished, Chief,' he said.

"I led the way into the tunnel. The tail end shaft had broken. The Second was right. The mate was in the engineroom when we came out of the tunnel. I told him what was wrong and he just said, 'That's torn it!' and went on deck. I followed.

"It was dark and blowing hard for the month of July. The ship had broached to and was shipping seas over the starboard rail. The Old Man was in his bunk. Either he hadn't noticed anything wrong or he didn't care. We broke the news.

" 'Trust an engineer,' he said, 'and see where it lands you. And you,' he said to the mate, 'you stuck up, brass bound liner miracle, hoist the not-under-command signal, which you probably don't know is two red lights in a vertical line—'

"The mate stopped him.

" 'I know more about signals,' he said, 'than you ever knew or are likely to know.'

" 'I'm glad you know something,' said the Old Man. 'I was beginning to doubt it. One thing this damn voyage will do is to make an honest penny in salvage for the skipper who tows us to Falmouth. Steam trained, by gad!' said the Old Man. 'Mister, you give me a pain.' He was sitting upright in bed, balancing himself to the roll and pouring himself a drink and spilling the whisky. I said:

" 'Captain Inchreed, the engines have broken down. Without the engines the best sailor in the world can't get any way on his ship.'

" 'Isn't that just what I say?' he said. 'Now get out of here or I'll throw the damn bottle at you.'

"When we reached the bridge deck the mate said:

" 'Mr. Harrington, I've an idea we're going to make Captain Inchreed feel not so good. Give me ten minutes while I go aft and nose round the lazaret.'

"DAWN was breaking and we were drinking coffee in the galley, the two mates, myself, the second engineer, the Third, Sparks, the bosun, the carpenter, the donkeyman and the steward, when the mate unfolded his plan.

" 'There are trysails and staysails for each mast,' he said. 'We'll set them at once. After that we'll rig up square sails out of tarpaulins. I'm not sure how, but we'll do it somehow and sail the *Coleraine* into Falmouth. I'm steam trained, but my father and grandfather were old squarerigged men from Salem. Maybe I've inherited the hang of the thing; maybe not. But,' he said, 'between us we ought to be able to think out a way to get a sufficient spread of sail.'

" 'Sounds crazy,' I said.

" 'But it isn't,' he said. 'I'm sorry to have to prove it's possible to move a steamer without engines, but there's no alternative. Captain Inchreed looks down on us because he knows all about sail and we don't. Suppose we sail the ship into Falmouth, what will he say to that?'

"Well, we got to work. We bent the trysails and staysails, and if I can't give you technical terms that's my misfor-

tune and not my fault. We bent the sails; that is to say we opened 'em out on the deck and fixed the various gadgets, eyelets and hanks, gantlines, brails, tacks and so on, so we could hoist away when we got the word. Yes, we did just that, and before I knew where I was I found myself chief engineer, *pro tem* and *ex-officio,* if you get what I mean, acting A.B, helping to loose a staysail, hooking the sheet on to the clew, letting go the downhaul, or whatever it is, hauling aft the slack of the sheet and hoisting away until the luff was tight and all the rest of it.

"We had a squaresail on each mast and a topsail as well. The yards on which the foresails were set were light derricks. The yards on which the topsails were set were spars that the carpenter had dug out of the 'tween-decks. And so we turned an old two-masted tramp steamer into a squarerigged ship and made headway.

"Our progress across the Bay of Biscay and into the English Channel was a triumph. Turbine passenger steamers, tramps, oil tankers, motor vessels, a flotilla of light cruisers and destroyers, steam trawlers by the score—we met 'em all, and all of 'em, without exception, went out of their way to get near enough to the *Coleraine* to see the most wonderful sight they'd ever seen in their lives and signal were we all right and did we want any assistance and good luck?

"Soon after daybreak, the day before we were due to reach Falmouth, the steward asked me to come and have a look at the Old Man. I didn't see why I should go, but I did. He had the horrors bad and was crawling around the deck on his knees, trying to catch something I couldn't see, but he could. We put him into his bunk and told him not to be frightened, but whatever it was I'd pretended to throw out of the doorway had come into the room again through a port and he wanted to hide from it. He hit me in the face because I wouldn't get out of the way.

"To quiet him down we gave him a dose out of the medicine chest and when he was half asleep I took all that was left of his whisky and dumped it into the ditch. And then I told the steward that when we reached England I'd put in a report about Captain Inchreed that would put him where he belonged, in clink or a home for inebriates. The steward didn't like it. He went quite red in the face. He said:

" 'Captain Inchreed has done more for me than any one else have did and I owe him a debt I've not been able to pay back. He saved my life one night in Capetown ten year ago, soon after he'd changed over from sail to steam. He came on board not drunk, but three parts gone, just as two of the firemen took it into their heads to beat me up because they thought the food wasn't so good as it ought to have been. The Old Man laid one of them out with a punch that broke his jaw and the other he picked up and dropped over the rail.

" 'The trouble was,' the steward said, 'the man he dropped over the rail got drowned and though the coroner's jury brought in a verdict that he'd met his death by misadventure it preyed on Captain Inchreed's mind,' he said, 'so that he was never the same after. He said if he'd stayed in sail he'd never have got into the mess, because he'd never have had to deal with firemen.'

" 'Or engineers,' I said. 'Get on with it.'

" 'He lost his ship six months later when we went ashore in a fog in the Gulf of St. Lawrence,' said the steward. 'His ticket wasn't touched, but he wasn't employed again afloat, not even in the war, not till the owners who'd been paying him a little now and again as a kind of watchman and so on gave him the job of bringing the *Coleraine* home from Port Said. What's more,' said the Steward, 'they promised him another ship. This is his one chance to get back, and if you report him now, then he's ruined.'

" 'Steward,' I said, 'if that's all you

can say in his favor I'm not impressed.'

"'Mr. Harrington,' the steward said, 'after he lost his ship we were both of us living ashore in Liverpool. I went down with pneumonia. My wife nursed me till she got sick, too. Every penny we had we'd lost in a grocery business. We hadn't any food left in the house. We couldn't even afford a doctor. Captain Inchreed came to see me and found how we were fixed. He hadn't any money to spare himself, but what he did have he spent on us without giving it a second thought. He called in a doctor and then stayed with us and nursed us both. It wasn't his fault my wife died, Mr. Harrington,' the steward said. 'A man who would do what he done to help another man in trouble is worth helping when he's in trouble himself, isn't he?'

"'Right,' I said. 'He is.'

"The mate and I talked things over and then we went to the Old Man's room—this must have been somewhere around two in the afternoon—and found him wide awake, thirsty once more and demanding whisky. I said there wasn't any. I'd thrown it overboard. When he stopped to draw breath I told him it was kill or cure for him. And it was," said Mr. Harrington with a little laugh. "We hauled him out of his bunk on to the lower bridge and turned the hose on him and washed the booze out of him. He yelled and he cursed and he tried to fight, but it wasn't the least use. We'd made up our minds to save him his ticket and we did. We kept the hose played on him till he rolled over in a kind of faint and then we carried him into his room and rubbed him bone dry and put him to bed.

"Later that same afternoon I went to his room. He sat on his settee, white faced and red eyed and horrible, but shaven and clean and dressed in uniform. He looked at me and put his hands to his head and groaned. I asked him how he was and then I said:

"'Tomorrow we'll be at Falmouth. If you don't say a word, you're safe. No one will know. Though you've given the mate and myself, but especially the mate, a rotten deal, nothing's to be gained by showing you up.' All he said was—

"'I wish I was dead.'

"'But why?' I said.

"'The mate's steam trained, yet he's brought the *Coleraine* home under sail. He did what I ought to have done and didn't. I'm no good. I've proved it.'

"THAT evening we sighted a motor boat headed toward us traveling at a speed that would have left the old *Mauretania* standing still. She circled and came alongside, and the men in the stern yelled us to throw them a line. They made fast and we put over a pilot ladder and a young man climbed up to the after deck.

"'So it's true, after all,' he said. 'We heard but we didn't believe. Where's your captain?'

"'Who are you?' said the mate.

"'I'm a reporter from the London *Daily Mercury*,' said the young man.

"'The captain's a sick man,' the mate said.

"'Hardships of the voyage, eh?' said the reporter.

"'Undoubtedly,' the mate said.

"'I've brought you some beer and some baccy and some fresh beef and some bread,' said the reporter.

"'You deserve something for that, at least,' the mate said.

Just then the Old Man came out of his room and stood on the lower bridge, looking down on us.

"'Captain Inchreed,' the mate said, 'here's a newspaperman to see you.'

"'Send him away,' said the Old Man.

"'You'd better see him, sir,' said the mate. 'It can't do any harm. It may do some good.'

"'Five minutes, then,' said the Old Man. 'No more.' And in five minutes' time he went into his room and slammed the door. The reporter came down the ladder beaming.

" 'Where's the rest of the crew?' he said.

" 'This is the crew that you see,' I said.

" 'The others deserted at Algiers,' said the mate. 'We brought the ship home without them.'

"The reporter said it was the most amazing thing he'd ever heard. It would be the talk of London tomorrow, he said. And then he said he'd have to get his story and the pictures he'd taken to his newspaper at once, so he'd have to go, but if there were any telegrams we'd like him to send he'd be pleased to do so, and charge the cost to his expense account.

"And that's about all," said Mr. Harrington, stretching out his arms and yawning. "Next day we picked up the Falmouth pilot and, as soon as the health authorities and the customs had done with us and tugs were towing us to our anchorage and all the steamers in port were blowing their whistles, the reporters boarded us. Horan, the second engineer, came to my room where I was having a shave and laid a copy of the London *Daily Mercury* flat on my desk.

" 'Just cast your eyes on this, Chief,' he said.

"I read in big headlines: 'Epic of the Sea. Heroic Captain brings home disabled steamer under sail.' Underneath I read how Captain Inchreed, an old time sailing ship captain, had contrived sails out of tarpaulins when the tail end shaft had broken and had brought his steamer home without the aid of her engines and with only ten men to help him. Captain Inchreed, I gathered, deserved well of his fellow countrymen. There wasn't a word about young Carter, the mate!

"On my way to the lower bridge I met him.

" 'Mr. Harrington,' he said, 'I've had good news.'

" 'Mr. Carter,' I said, 'have you seen those lies that damn fool put in the *Daily Mercury*? I'm going to tell the Old Man he's got to put it right.'

" 'Mr. Harrington,' the mate said, 'wait one minute. I want to talk to you.'

"I flung open the captain's door. His sitting room was crowded.

" 'Captain Inchreed,' I said, 'have you seen this paper?' He half rose to his feet and then sat down again. A large, stout man in a blue suit and glasses patted his shoulder.

" 'Leave it to me, Captain Inchreed,' he said. He turned to me and said, 'You're the chief engineer, I understand. I'm the managing director of the firm that sent Captain Inchreed to Port Said to bring the *Coleraine* home. I told him that if I had a difficult job to be done I'd sooner trust him than any one else. I was right.' And then he laughed. 'Rather a blow to an engineer, though, to have an old time sailing ship captain show him that engines aren't everything, isn't it?'

"I was getting damn sore. I said:

" 'I've something to say that will put what's happened in a clearer light.' Before I could say anything else the mate grabbed my arm.

" 'Half a second, Mr. Harrington,' he said. And then he said, 'I think you gentlemen ought to know that all of us on board the *Coleraine* wish to associate ourselves with Mr. Harrington in his congratulations to Captain Inchreed. I don't know,' he said, 'what we should have done without him and I know that this is what Mr. Harrington had in mind to say. I can assure you that we realize now what sail training will do for a man and how little we steam trained men know compared with a man like Captain Inchreed.'

"And then, believe me, Mister, or believe me not, all them solemn owls in the Old Man's room began to clap their hands and the Old Man—honest! this is gospel truth—the Old Man laid his wicked old head on his desk and cried.

"When the mate and I were on the bridge deck once more I said—

" 'What was the meaning of that, Mr. Carter?'

" 'Mr. Harrington,' he said, 'could you have said what you'd thought you would say?'

" 'Why, of course,' I said.

"He looked at me in that queer, old fashioned way of his, and I said:

" 'No, I couldn't. I'd have said what you said. Or if I hadn't,' I said, 'I'd have been sorry afterward. What I'd like to know is what credit you get out of it?'

" 'Read this,' he said. He shoved a cablegram into my hand and I read:

"LONGING TO SEE YOU. WELL AND STRONG. ALL MY LOVE, DARLING.
—KITTY.

" 'Great, isn't it?' he said.

" 'What does it mean?' I said.

" 'The day before we left Algiers,' he said, 'I had a reply to a cable I'd sent to Boston and I heard that the girl I'm going to marry was maybe dying. They were going to operate at once. I didn't know what to do,' he said. 'I had to stay by the ship. I'd signed on. But it was hell. I didn't know what news I'd have here at Falmouth. I didn't dare think what might have happened at Boston.'

" 'We'd have been here sooner if we'd been taken in tow,' I said. He nodded.

" 'I thought of that, but I knew that either Kitty was out of danger or—or it would be too late. Do you see what I mean?' he said. 'If I heard Kitty was dead, my not having done my best for the ship wouldn't have made things any easier to bear, would it? You see what I mean, Mr. Harrington,' he said, 'don't you? A sailor's got to do the best for his ship, hasn't he?' And then he laughed. 'But Kitty's alive and well and I helped bring the *Coleraine* into Falmouth under sail, so what the hell?' "

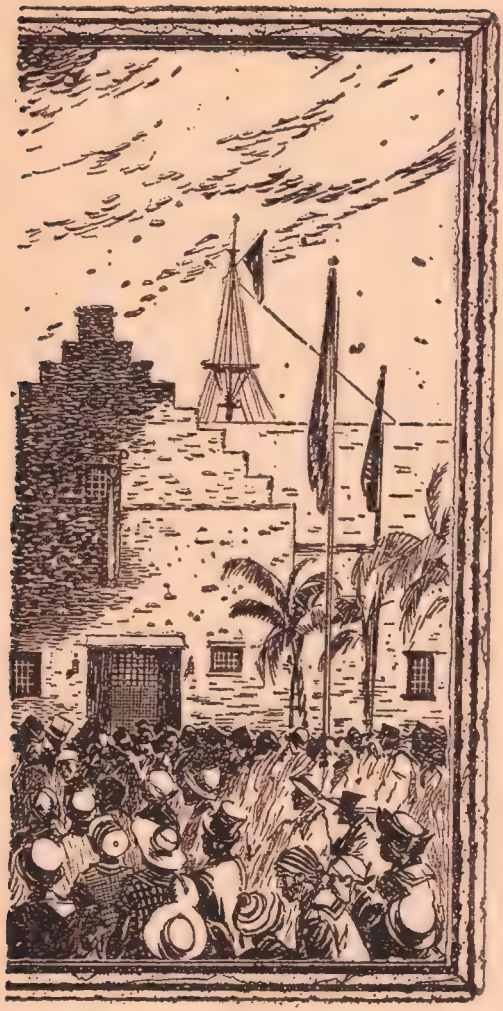
Mr. Harrington grinned and ended his story.

"And that's how I learned about sail," he said.

A Novelette of Piracy and

I FIRST became acutely aware of the dreadful tragedy of Saul Maccartney one sunny morning early in the month of November of the year 1927. On that occasion, instead of walking across the hall from my bathroom after shaving and the early morning shower, I turned to the left upon emerging and, in my bathrobe and slippers, went along the upstairs hallway to my workroom on the northwest corner of the house into which I had just moved, in the west coast town of Frederiksted on the island of Santa Cruz.

This pleasant room gave a view through its several windows directly down from the hill on which the house was located, across the pretty town with its red roofs and varicolored houses, directly upon the indigo Caribbean. This workroom of mine had a north light from its two windows on that side and, as I used it only during the mornings, I thus escaped the terrific sun drench-



SEVEN TURNS IN A HANGMAN'S ROPE

By

HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

Black Magic

ing to which, in the absence of any shade without, the room was subjected during the long West Indian afternoon.

The occasion for going in there was my desire to see, in the clear morning light, what that ancient oil painting looked like; the canvas which, without its frame, I had tacked up on the south wall the evening before.

This trophy, along with various other items of household flotsam and jetsam, had been taken the previous afternoon, which was a day after my arrival on the island, out of a kind of lumber room wherein the owners of the house had plainly been storing for the best part of a century the kinds of things which accumulate in a family. Of the considerable amount of material which my houseman, Stephen Penn, had taken out and stacked and piled in the upper hallway, there happened to be nothing of interest except this good sized painting—which was about three feet by five in size. Stephen had paused to examine it curiously and it was this which drew my attention to it.

Under my first cursory examination, which was little more than a glance, I had supposed the thing to be one of those ubiquitous Victorian horrors of reproduction which fifty years ago might have been observed on the walls of most middle class front parlors, and which were known as chromos. But

later that evening, on picking it up and looking at it under the electric light, I found that it was honest paint, and I examined it more closely and with a constantly increasing interest.

The painting was obviously the work of a fairly clever amateur. The frame of very old and dry wood had been riddled through and through by woodworms; it literally fell apart in my hands. I left it there on the floor for Stephen to brush up the next morning and took the canvas into my bedroom where there was a better light. The accumulation of many years' dust and grime had served to obscure its once crudely bright coloration. I carried it into my bathroom, made a lather of soap and warm water, and gave it a careful and much needed cleansing, after which the scene delineated before me assumed a surprising freshness and clarity.

After I had dried it off with a hand towel, using great care lest I crack the ancient pigment, I went over it with an oiled cloth. This process really brought it out, and although the canvas was something more than a century old, the long obscured and numerous figures with which it had been almost completely covered seemed once more as bright and clear—and quite as crude—as upon the long distant day when that rather clever amateur artist had laid down his (or perhaps her) brush after putting on the very last dab of vermilion paint.

The subject of the old painting, as I recognized quite soon, was an almost forgotten incident in the history of the old Danish West Indies. It had, quite obviously, been done from the viewpoint of a person on board a ship. Before me, as the setting of the scene, was the well known harbor of St. Thomas with its dull red fort at my right—looking exactly as it does today. At the left hand margin were the edges of various public buildings which have long since been replaced. In the midst, and occupying nearly the entire spread of the canvas, with Government Hill and its fine houses sketched in for background, was shown the execution of Fawcett, the pirate, with his two lieutenants; an occasion which had constituted a general holiday for the citizens of St. Thomas, and which had taken place, as I happened to be aware, on the eleventh of September, 1825. If the picture had been painted at that time, and it seemed apparent that such was the case, the canvas would be just one hundred and two years old.

My interest now thoroughly aroused, I bent over it and examined it with close attention. Then I went into my workroom and brought back my large magnifying glass.

MY SOMEWHAT clever amateur artist had left nothing to the imagination. The picture contained no less than two hundred and three human figures. Of these only those in the remoter backgrounds were sketched in roughly in the modern manner. The actual majority were very carefully depicted with a laborious infinitude of detail; and I suspected then, and since have found every reason to believe, that many, if not most of them, were portraits! There before my eyes were portly Danish worthies of a century ago, with their ladyfolk, all of whom had come out to see Captain Fawcett die. There were the officers of the garrison. There were the gendarmes of the period, in their stiff looking uniforms after the manner of Frederick the Great.

There were negroes, some with large gold rings hanging from one ear; negresses in their bebustled gingham dresses and bare feet, their foulards or varicolored head handkerchiefs topped by the broad brimmed plaited straw hats which are still to be seen along modern St. Thomas's concrete drives and sidewalks. There was the executioner, a huge, burly, fierce looking black man; with the policemaster standing beside and a little behind him, gorgeous in his

glistening white drill uniform with its gilt decorations. The two stood on the central and largest of the three scaffolds.

The executioner was naked to the waist and had his woolly head bound up in a tight fitting scarlet kerchief. He had only that moment sprung the drop, and there at the end of the manila rope (upon which the artist had carefully painted in the seven turns of the traditional hangman's knot placed precisely under the left ear of the miscreant now receiving the just reward of his innumerable villainies) hung Captain Fawcett himself, the gruesome central figure of this holiday pageant—wearing top boots and a fine plum colored laced coat.

On either side, and from the ropes of the two smaller gibbets, dangled those two lesser miscreants, Fawcett's mates. Obviously their several executions, like the preliminary bouts of a modern boxing program; had preceded the main event of the day.

The three gibbets had been erected well to the left of the central space which I have described. The main bulk of the spectators was consequently to the right as one looked at the picture, on the fort side.

After more than a fascinating hour with my magnifying glass, it being then eleven o'clock and time to turn in, I carried the brittle old canvas into my workroom and by the rather dim light of a shaded reading lamp fastened it carefully at a convenient height against the south wall with thumbtacks. The last tack went through the arm of the hanging man nearest the picture's extreme left hand margin. After accomplishing this I went to bed.

The next morning, as I have mentioned, being curious to see how the thing looked in a suitable light, I walked into the workroom and looked at it.

I received a devastating shock.

My eye settled after a moment or two upon that dangling mate whose body hung from its rope near the extreme left hand margin of the picture. I found it difficult to believe my eyes. In this clear morning light the expression of the fellow's face had changed startlingly from what I remembered after looking at it closely through my magnifying glass. Last night it had been merely the face of a man just hanged; I had noted it particularly because, of all the more prominent figures, that face had been most obviously an attempt at exact portraiture.

Now it wore a new and unmistakable expression of acute agony.

And down the dangling arm, from the point which that last thumbtack had incontinently transfixed, there ran, and dripped off the fellow's fingers, a stream of bright, fresh red blood. . .

II

BETWEEN the time when the clipper schooner, which had easily overhauled the Maccartney trading vessel *Hope*—coming north across the Caribbean and heavily laden with sacked coffee from Barranquilla—had sent a challenging shot from its swivel-gun across the *Hope's* bows, and his accomplishing the maneuver of coming about in obedience to that unmistakable summons, Captain Saul Maccartney had definitely decided what policy he should follow.

He had made numerous voyages in the *Hope* among the bustling trade ports of the Caribbean and to and from his own home port of St. Thomas, and never before, by the Grace of God and the Maccartney luck, had any freetrader called upon him to stand and deliver on the high seas. But, like all seafaring men of Captain Maccartney's generation, plying their trade in those latitudes in the early 1820's, he was well aware of what was now in store for him, his father's ship and the members of his crew. The *Hope* would be looted; then probably scuttled, in accordance with the freetraders' well nigh universal pol-

icy of destroying every scrap of evidence against them. As for himself and his men, they would be confronted with the formula—

"Join, or go over the side!"

A pirate's recruit was a pirate, at once involved in a status which was without the law. His evidence, even if he were attempting the dangerous double game of merely pretending to join his captor, was worthless.

There was one possible ray of hope, direct resistance being plainly out of the question. This might be one of the better established freebooters, a piratical captain and following whose notoriety was already so widespread, who was already so well known, that he would not take the trouble to destroy the *Hope;* or, beyond the usual offer made to all volunteers for a piratical crew—constantly in need of such replacements—to put the captured vessel, officers and crew through the mill; once they were satisfied that there was nothing aboard this latest prize to repay them for the trouble and risk of capture and destruction.

The *Hope,* laden almost to her gunwales with sacked coffee, would provide lean pickings for a freetrader, despite the value of her bulk cargo in a legitimate port of trade like Savannah or Norfolk. There were cases, known to Captain Maccartney, where a piratical outfit under the command of some notable such as Edward Thatch—often called Teach, or Blackbeard—or England, or Fawcett, or Jacob Brenner, had merely sheered off and sailed away in search of more desirable game as soon as it was plain that the loot was neither easily portable nor of the type of value represented by bullion, silks, or the strong box of some inter-island trading supercargo.

It was plain enough to Captain Saul Maccartney, whose vessel had been stopped here about a day's sail south-southwest of his home port of St. Thomas, capital of the Danish West Indies, and whose cargo was intended for delivery to several ship's brokerage houses in that clearing house port for the vast West Indian shipping trade, that this marauder of the high seas could do nothing with his coffee. These ideas were very prominent in his mind in the interval between his shouted orders and the subsequent period during which the *Hope,* her way slacking rapidly, hung in the wind, her jibs, booms and loose rigging slapping angrily while the many boats from the freetrading vessel were slung outboard in a very brisk and workman-like manner and dropped one after the other into the water alongside until every one—seven in all—had been launched.

These boats were so heavily manned as to leave them very low in the water. Now the oars moved with an almost delicate precision as though the rowers feared some mischance even in that placid sea. The *Hope's* officers and crew—all of the latter negroes—crowded along their vessel's starboard rail, the mates quiet and collected as men taking their cue from their superior officer; the crew goggle eyed, chattering in low tones among themselves in groups and knots, motivated by the sudden looming terror which showed in a gray tinge upon their black skins.

Then, in a strident whisper from the first mate, a shrewd and experienced bucko, hailing originally from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, wise in the ways of these tropical latitudes from twenty years' continuous seafaring:

"God! It's Fawcett himself!"

Slowly, deliberately, as though entirely disdainful of any possible resistance, the seven boats drew toward the doomed *Hope.* The two foremost edged in close alongside her starboard quarter and threw small grapples handily from bow and stern and so hung in under the *Hope's* lee.

Captain Saul Maccartney, cupping his hands, addressed over the heads of the intervening six boatloads the man seated in the sternsheets of the outermost boat:

"Cargo of sacked Brazil coffee, Captain, and nothing else to make it worth your while to come aboard me—if you'll take my word for it. That's the facts, sir, so help me God!"

In silence from all hands in the boats and without any immediate reply from Fawcett, this piece of information was received. Captain Fawcett sat there at the sternsheets of his longboat, erect, silent, presumably pondering what Captain Saul Maccartney had told him. He sat there calm and unruffled, a fine gold laced tricorn hat on his head, which, together with the elegance of his wine colored English broadcloth coat, threw into sharp relief his brutal, unshaven face with its sinister, shining white scar—the result of an old cutlass wound—which ran diagonally from the upper corner of his left ear forward down the cheek, across both lips, clear to the edge of his prominent chin.

FAWCETT, the pirate, ended his reflective interval. He raised his head, rubbed a soiled hand through his beard's stubble and spat outboard.

"Any ship's biscuit left aboard ye?" he inquired, turning his eye along the *Hope's* freeboard and thence contemplatively about her masts and rigging. "We're short."

"I have plenty, Captain. Will it answer if I have it passed over the side to ye?"

The two vessels and the seven heavily laden boats lay tossing silently in the gentle swell. Not a sound broke the tension while Captain Fawcett appeared to deliberate.

Then a second time he spat over the side of his longboat and rubbed his black stubbly chin with his hand, reflectively. Then he looked across his boats directly at Captain Saul Maccartney. The ghost of a sour grin broke momentarily the grim straight line of his maimed and cruel mouth.

"I'll be comin' aboard ye, Captain," he said very slowly, "if ye have no objection to make."

A bellow of laughter at this sally of their captain's rose from the huddled pirate crew in the boats and broke the mounting tension. A negro at the *Hope's* rail cackled hysterically, and a chorus of gibes at this arose from the motley crews of the two boats grappled alongside.

In the silence which followed Captain Fawcett muttered a curt, monosyllabic order. The other five boats closed in without haste, two of them passing around the *Hope's* stern and another around her bow. It was only a matter of a few seconds before the entire seven hung along the *Hope's* sides like feasting wolves upon the flanks of a stricken deer. Then at a second brief order their crews came over the rails quietly and in good order, Fawcett himself arriving last upon the *Hope's* deck. No resistance of any kind was offered. Captain Maccartney had had the word passed quietly on that score while the pirates' boats were being slung into the water.

After the bustling scramble involved in nearly a hundred men climbing over the *Hope's* rail from the seven boats and which was, despite the excellent order maintained, a maneuver involving considerable noisy activity, another and even a more ominous silence settled down upon the beleaguered *Hope*.

Supported by his two mates, one of whom was a small, neat, carefully dressed fellow, and the other an enormous German who sported a cavalryman's mustache and walked truculently, Captain Fawcett proceeded directly aft, where he turned and faced forward, a mate on either side of him, and leaned against the superstructure of Captain Maccartney's cabin.

Maccartney's mates, taking pattern from this procedure, walked over from the rail and flanked him where he stood just aft of the *Hope's* foremast. The rest of the freebooters, having apparently been left free by their officers to do as they pleased for the time being, strolled about the deck looking over

the vessel's superficial equipment, and then gathered in little knots and groups about the eleven negro members of the *Hope's* crew.

Through this intermingling the comparative silence which had followed their coming aboard began to be dissipated with raillery, various low voiced sallies of crude wit at the negroes' expense, and an occasional burst of nervous or raucous laughter. All this, however, was carried on, as Captain Maccartney took it in, in what was to him an unexpectedly restrained and quiet manner, utterly at variance with the reputed conduct of such a group of abandoned villains at sea, and to him, at least, convincing evidence that something sinister was in the wind.

This expectation had its fulfilment at a harsh blast from the whistle which, at Fawcett's nod, the huge German mate had taken from his pocket and blown.

Instantly the pirates closed in and seized those members of the *Hope's* negro crew who stood nearest them; several, sometimes five or six, men crowding in to overpower each individual. Five or six of the pirates who had been as though without purpose near the forward hatchway which led below decks began forthwith to knock out the wedges. The *Hope's* negroes, with a unanimity which bespoke the excellent discipline and strategy which Fawcett was generally understood to maintain, were hustled forward and thrust into the forecastle; the hatch of which, as soon as they were all inside, was forthwith closed tight and at once nailed fast by the undersized little Englishman who was Fawcett's ship's carpenter.

None of the *Hope's* crew had been armed. None seemed to Captain Maccartney to have been even slightly injured in the course of this rough and effective handling. Captain Maccartney surmised, and rightly, that the pirates' intention was to preserve them alive either for ultimate sale into slavery, which was of course then extant throughout the West India Islands, or, perhaps, to convey them as shore servants to Fawcett's settlement which, it was generally believed, was well in the interior of the island of Andros in the Bahama group, where a network of interlacing creeks, rendering anything like pursuit and capture well nigh out of the question, had made this pirate fastness a stronghold.

But Captain Maccartney had little time to waste thinking over the fate of his crew. With perhaps a shade less of the roughness with which the negroes had been seized he and his mates were almost simultaneously surrounded and marched aft to face their captors. It seemed plain that the usual choice was to be given only to the three of them.

FAWCETT did not hesitate this time. He looked at the three men standing before him, lowered his head, relaxed his burly figure and barked out—

"Ye'll join me or go over the side."

He pointed a dirty finger almost directly into the face of the older mate, who stood at his captain's right hand.

"You first," he barked again. "Name yer ch'ice, and name it now."

The hard bitten New Hampshire Yankee stood true to the traditions of an honest sailorman.

"To hell with ye, ye damned scalawag," he drawled, and spat on the deck between Captain Fawcett's feet.

There could be but one reply on the part of a man of Fawcett's heady character to such an insult as this. With a speed that baffled the eye the great pistol which hung from the right side of his belt beneath the flap of his fine broadcloth coat was snatched free, and to the accompaniment of its tearing roar, its huge ounce ball smote through the luckless Yankee's forehead. As the acrid cloud of smoke from this detonation blew away Captain Maccartney observed the huge German mate lifting the limp body which, as though it had been that of a child, he carried in great

strides to the nearer rail and heaved overboard.

Fawcett pointed with his smoking weapon at Maccartney's other mate, a small built fellow, originally a British subject from the Island of Antigua. The mate merely nodded comprehendingly. Then—

"The same as Elias Perkins told ye, ye blasted swab, and may ye rot deep in hell."

But Fawcett's surly humor appeared to have evaporated, to have discharged itself in the pistoling of the other man whose scattered brains had left an ugly smear on the *Hope's* clean deck. He merely laughed and, with a comprehensive motion of his left hand, addressed the larger of his mates, who had resumed his position at his left.

"Take him, Franz," he ordered.

The huge mate launched himself upon the Antiguan like a ravening beast. With lightning-like rapidity his enormous left arm coiled crushingly about the doomed man's neck. Simultaneously, his open right hand against his victim's forehead, he pushed mightily. The little Antiguan's spine yielded with an audible crack and his limp body slithered loosely to the deck. Then with a sweeping, contemptuous motion the huge mate grasped the limp form in one hand, lifting it by the front of the waistcoat and, whirling about, hurled it with a mighty pitch far outboard.

The German mate had not yet resumed his place beside Fawcett when Captain Saul Maccartney addressed the pirate leader.

"I'm joining you, Captain," he said quietly.

And while the surprised Fawcett stared at him the newly enlisted freebooter, who had been Captain Saul Maccartney of the schooner *Hope,* with a motion which did not suffer by comparison with Fawcett's for its swiftness, had produced a long dirk, taken the two lightning strides necessary for an effective stroke, and had plunged his weapon with a mighty upward thrust from under the ribs through the German mate's heart.

Withdrawing it instantly, he stooped over the sprawled body and wiped the dirk's blade in a nonchalant and leisurely manner on the dead ruffian's fine cambric shirt frill. As he proceeded to this task he turned his head upward and slightly to the left and looked squarely in the eye the stultified pirate captain who stood motionless and staring in his surprise at this totally unexpected feat of his newest recruit. From his crouching position Saul Maccartney spoke, quietly and without emphasis—

"Ye see, sir, I disliked this larrikin from the minute I clapped eyes on him; and I'll call your attention to the fact that I'm a sound navigator; and—" Saul Maccartney smiled and showed his handsome teeth— "I'll ask your notice preliminary to my acting with you aft that it might equally well have been yourself that I scragged, and perhaps that'll serve to teach ye the manner of man that you're now taking on as an active lieutenant!"

Then Saul Maccartney, his bantering smile gone now, his Maccartney mouth set in a grim line, his cleansed dirk held ready in his sound right hand, stood menacingly before Captain Fawcett, their breasts almost touching, and in a quarter-deck voice inquired:

"And will ye be taking it or leaving it, Captain Fawcett?"

III

IT WAS more than two months later when the *Hope,* her hull now painted a shining black, her topmasts lengthened all round by six feet, her spread of canvas vastly increased, eight carronade ports newly cut along her sides, and renamed the *Swallow,* entered the harbor of St. Thomas, dropped her anchor and sent over her side a narrow longboat.

Into this boat, immediately after its crew of six oarsmen had settled down upon their thwarts and laid their six

long sweeps out upon the harbor water, interested onlookers observed two officers descend over the *Swallow's* side, where they occupied the sternsheets together. As the boat, rowed man-o'-war style, rapidly approached the wharves it was observed by those on shore that the two men seated astern were rather more than handsomely dressed.

The shorter and heavier man wore a fine sprigged long coat of English broadcloth with lapels, and a laced tricorn hat. His companion, whose appearance had about it something vaguely familiar, was arrayed in an equally rich and very well tailored, though somewhat plainer, coat of a medium blue which set off his handsome figure admirably. This person wore no hat at all, nor any shade for his head against the glare of the eleven o'clock sun save a heavy crop of carefully arranged and naturally curly hair as black as a crow's wing.

So interesting, indeed, to the loungers along the wharves had been the entrance of this previously unknown vessel into the harbor and the subsequent coming ashore of these two fine gentlemen, that a considerable knot of sightseers was already assembled on the particular jetty toward which the longboat, smartly rowed, came steadily closer and closer. The hatless gentleman, who was by far the taller and handsomer of the two, appeared to be steering, the taut tiller ropes held firmly in his large and very shapely hands.

It was the Herr Rudolph Bernn, who had observed the crowd collecting on the jetty through the open windows of his airy shipping office close at hand, and who had clapped on his pith sun helmet and hastened to join the group, who was the first to recognize this taller officer.

"Gude Gott! If id iss nod der Herr Captain Saul Maccartney. Gude Gott, how dey will be rejoiced— Oldt Maccartney andt de Miss Camilla!"

Within five minutes the rapidly approaching longboat had been laid aside the pier head in navy style. Without any delay the two gentlemen, whose advent had so greatly interested the St. Thomas harbor watchers, stepped ashore with an air and mounted the jetty steps side by side. At once Saul Maccartney, whose fine clothes so well became him, forged ahead of his well dressed, shaved and curled companion. He wore the dazzling smile which revealed his magnificent teeth and which had served to disarm every woman upon whom it had been consciously turned since his eighth year or thereabouts.

Like a conquering hero this handsome young man—who had taken clearance from the South American port of Barranquilla nearly three months before and subsequently disappeared into thin air along with his vessel and all hands off the face of the waters—now stepped jauntily across the jetty toward the welcoming group whose numbers were, now that the news of his homecoming was beginning to trickle through the town, constantly increasing. He was instantaneously surrounded by these welcoming acquaintances who sought each to outdo his neighbor in the enthusiastic fervency of his congratulatory greetings.

During this demonstration the redoubtable and notorious Captain Fawcett stood quietly looking on throughout its milling course, a sardonic smile faintly relieving the crass repulsiveness of his maimed countenance. The pirate had been "shaved to the blood" that morning; dressed for the occasion with the greatest care. His carefully arranged locks were redolent of the oil of Bergamot, filched a week before out of the accessories of a lady passenger taken from the luckless vessel on which she had been coming out to the West Indies to join her planter husband. This lady had, after certain passing attentions from Saul Maccartney, gone over the *Swallow's* side in plain sight of the volcanic cone of Nevis, the island of her destination.

That Maccartney had brought Captain Fawcett ashore with him here in St. Thomas was a piece of judgment so lamentably bad as to need no comment

of any kind. His doing so initiated that swift course of events which brought down upon his handsome head that ruinous doom which stands, probably, as unique among the annals of retribution; that devastating doom which, for its horror and its strangeness, transcends and surpasses, in all human probability, even the direst fate, which, in this old world's long history, may have overtaken any other of the sons of men.

But the sheer effrontery of that act was utterly characteristic of Saul Maccartney

IN THE course of the long, painstaking, and probably exhaustive research which I, Gerald Canevin, set in motion in order to secure the whole range of facts forming the basis of this narrative —an investigation which has extended through more than three years and has taken me down some very curious by-paths of antique West Indian history as well as into contact with various strange characters and around a few very alluring corners of research—one aspect of the whole affair stands out in my mind most prominently. This is the fact that —as those many who nowadays increasingly rely for guidance upon the once discredited but now reviving science of astrology would phrase it—Saul Maccartney was in all ways "a typical Sagittarian!"

One of the more readily accessible facts which I looked up out of ancient, musty records in the course of this strange affair was the date of his birth. He had been born in the city of St. Thomas on the twenty-eighth of November, in the year 1795. He was thus twenty-nine—in his thirtieth year and the full vigor of his manhood—at the time when Captain Fawcett had captured the *Hope* and, having lightened that vessel by emptying her hold of her cargo which he consigned to the sea, and having scuttled his own disabled vessel, had sailed for his home base among the Andros creeks.

From there a month later the transformed *Swallow* had emerged to maraud upon the Spanish Main. He was not yet out of his twenties when he had chosen to tempt fate by coming ashore with Fawcett in St. Thomas. He was still short of thirty when a certain fateful day dawned in the month of September, 1825.

True to this hypothetical horoscope of his and to every sidereal circumstance accompanying it, Saul Maccartney was an entirely self-centered person. With him the "main chance" had always been paramount. It was this addiction to the main chance which had caused him to join Fawcett. A similar motive had actuated him in the notable coup which had at once, because of its sheer directness and the courage involved in it, established him in the high esteem of the pirate captain. There had been no sentiment in his killing of the gigantic mate, Franz. He was not thinking of avenging his own faithful lieutenant whom that hulking beast had slain with his bare hands before his eyes a moment before he had knifed the murderer.

His calculating sense of self-interest had been the sole motive behind that act. He could quite as easily have destroyed Fawcett, himself, as he characteristically pointed out to that ruffian. He would have done so with equal ruthlessness save for his knowledge of the fact that he would have been overwhelmed immediately thereafter by Fawcett's underlings.

There is very little question but what he would have before very long succeeded to the command of the *Swallow* and the control of the considerable commerce in the slave trade and other similar illegitimate sources of revenue which went with the command of this piratical enterprise. He had already inaugurated the replacement of Captain Fawcett by himself in the esteem of that freebooter's numerous following well before the refurbished *Swallow* had sailed proudly out upon her current voyage. His unquestionable courage and enormous gift

of personality had already been for some time combining actively to impress the pirate crew. Among them he was already a dominating figure.

Since well before he had attained manly maturity he had been irresistible to women. He was a natural fighter who loved conflict for its own sake. His skill with weapons was well nigh phenomenal. In the prosecution of every affair which concerned his own benefit, he had always habituated himself to going straight to the mark. He was, in short, as it might be expressed, both with respect to women and the securing of his own advantage in general affairs, thoroughly spoiled by an unbroken course of getting precisely what he wanted.

This steady impact of continuous success and the sustained parallel effect of unceasing feminine adulation had entrenched in his character the fatal conviction that he could do as he pleased in every imaginable set of conditions.

The first reversal suffered in this unbroken course of selfish domination inaugurated itself not very long after he had stepped ashore with Captain Fawcett beside him. After ten minutes or so, Maccartney gradually got himself free from the crowd of friends congratulating him there on the jetty.

Stimulated as he always was by such adulation, highly animated, his Irish blue eyes flashing, his smile unabated, his selfish heart full to repletion of his accustomed self-confidence, he disentangled himself from the still increasing crowd and, with several bows and various wavings of his left hand as he backed away from them, he rejoined Fawcett, linked his right arm through the crook of the pirate captain's left elbow and proceeded to conduct him into the town. Those fellows on the wharf were small fry! He would, as he smilingly mentioned in Fawcett's ear, prefer to introduce the captain at once into a gathering place where he would meet a group of gentlemen of greater importance.

They walked up into the town and turned to the left through the bustling traffic of its chief thoroughfare and, proceeding to the westward for a couple of hundred feet or so, turned in through a wide arched doorway above which, on its bracket, perched guardian-like a small gilded rooster. This was Le Coq d'Or, rendezvous of the more prosperous merchants of the flourishing city of St. Thomas.

A CONSIDERABLE number of these prosperous worthies were already assembled at the time of their arrival in Le Coq d'Or. Several negroes under the direction of the steward of this club-like clearing house were already bringing in and placing on the huge polished mahogany table the planter's punch, swizzles of brandy or rum, and sangaree such as always accompanied this late-morning assembly. It lacked only a minute or two of eleven, and the stroke of that hour was sacred at Le Coq d'Or and similar foregathering places as the swizzle hour. No less a personage than M. Daniell, some years before a refugee from the Haitian revolution and now a merchant prince here in the Danish colonial capital, was already twirling a carved swizzle stick in the fragrant iced interior of an enormous silver jug.

But this hospitable activity, as well as the innumerable conversations current about that board, ceased abruptly when these city burghers had recognized the tall, handsome gentleman in blue broadcloth who had just stepped in among them. It was, indeed, practically a repetition of what had occurred on the jetty, save that here the corporate and individual greetings were, if anything, more intimate and more vociferous.

Here were the natural associates, the intimates, the social equals of the Maccartneys themselves—a well-to-do clan of proud, self-respecting personages deriving from the class of Irish protestant high gentry which had come into these islands three generations before upon the invitation of the Danish Colonial

Government.

Among those who rose out of their chairs to surround Saul Maccartney with hilarious greetings was Denis Maccartney, his father. He had suspected that the Old Man would be there. The two clasped each other in a long and affectionate embrace, Denis Maccartney agitated and tearful, his son smiling with an unforced whimsicality throughout the intensive contact of this reunion. At last the Old Man, his tears of happiness still flowing, held off and gazed fondly at his handsome, strapping son, a pair of still trembling hands upon the shoulders of the beautiful new broadcloth coat.

"An' where, in God's own name, have ye been hidin' yourself away, Saul, me boy?" he asked solicitously.

The others grouped about, and now fallen silent, hovered about the edge of this demonstration, the universal West Indian courtesy only restraining their common enthusiasm to clasp the Maccartney prodigal by his bronzed and shapely hands, to thump his back, to place kindly arms about his broad shoulders, later to thrust brimming goblets of cut crystal upon him that they might drink his health and generously toast his safe and unexpected return.

"I'll tell ye all about that later, sir," said Saul Maccartney, his dazzling smile lighting up his bronzed face. "Ye'll understand, sir, my anxiety to see Camilla; though, of course, I looked in upon ye first off."

And thereupon, in his sustained bravado, in the buoyancy of his fatal conviction that he, Saul Maccartney, could get away with anything whatever he might choose to do, and taking full advantage of the disconcerting effect of his announcement that he must run off, he turned to Captain Fawcett, who had been standing close behind him and, an arm about the captain's shoulders, presented him formally to his father, to M. Daniell and, with a comprehensive wave of his disengaged arm, to the company at large; and, forthwith, well before the inevitable effect of this act could record itself upon the corporate mind of such a group, Saul Maccartney had whirled about, reached the arched doorway almost at a run, and disappeared in the blinding glare, on his way to call upon his cousin Camilla.

The group of gentlemen assembled in Le Coq d'Or that morning, intensely preoccupied as they had been with the unexpected restoration to their midst of the missing mariner, Maccartney, had barely observed the person who had accompanied him. They were now rather abruptly left facing their new guest, and their immediate reaction after Maccartney's hasty departure was to stage a greeting for this very evil looking but highly dandified fellow whom they found in their midst. To this they proceeded forthwith, actuated primarily by the unfailing and highly developed courtesy which has always been the outstanding characteristic of the Lesser Antilles.

There was not a man present who had not winced at the name which Saul Maccartney had so clearly pronounced in the course of his threefold introduction of Captain Fawcett. For this name, as that of one of the principal maritime scourges of the day, was indeed very familiar to these men, attuned as they were to seafaring matters. Several of them, in fact, vessel owners, had actually been sufferers at the hands of this man who now sat among them.

Courtesy, however—and to a guest in this central sanctum—came first. Despite their initial suspicion, by no single overt act, nor by so much as a single glance, did any member of that polished company allow it to be suspected that he had at least given harborage to the idea that Saul Maccartney had brought Fawcett the pirate here to Le Coq d'Or and left him among them as a guest.

Besides, doubtless, it occurred to each and every one of these excellent gentlemen, apart from the impossibility of such a situation being precipitated by any one named Maccartney—which was an additional loophole for them—the

name of Fawcett was by no means an uncommon one; there might well be half a dozen Fawcetts on Lloyd's List who were or had been commanders of ships. It was, of course, possible that this overdressed, tough looking sea hawk had fooled the usually astute Saul.

AS FOR Fawcett himself, the wolf among these domestic cattle, he was enjoying the situation vastly. The man was intelligent and shrewd, still capable of drawing about him the remnants of a genteel deportment; and, as the details of his projected coming ashore here had been quite fully discussed with Saul Maccartney, he had anticipated and was quite well prepared to meet the reaction released at the first mention of that hated and dreaded name of his, and which he now plainly sensed all about him. There was probably even a touch of pride over what his nefarious reputation could evoke in a group like this to nerve him for the curious ordeal which had now begun for him.

It was, of course, his policy to play quietly a conservative—an almost negative—rôle. He busied now his always alert mind with this, returning courtesy for courtesy as his hosts toasted him formally, assured him of their welcome, exchanged with him those general remarks which precede any real breaking of the ice between an established group and some unknown and untried newcomer.

It was Old Maccartney who gave him his chief stimulation by inquiring:

"An' what of me dear son, Captain? Ye will have been in his company for some time, it may be. It would be more than gracious of ye to relate to us —if so be ye're aware of it, perchance— what occurred to him on that last voyage of his from Sout' America."

At this really unexpected query the entire room fell silent. Every gentleman present restrained his own speech as though a signal had been given. Only the negro servants, intent upon their duties, continued to speak to each other under their breaths and to move soft footedly about the room.

Captain Fawcett recognized at once that Mr. Denis Maccartney's question contained no challenge. He had even anticipated it, with a thin yarn of shipwreck, which he and Saul had concocted together. In a sudden access of whimsical bravado he abandoned this cooked-up tale. He would give them a story . . .

He turned with an elaborate show of courtesy to Old Maccartney. He set down his half emptied goblet, paused, wiped his maimed mouth with a fine cambric handkerchief and set himself, in the breathless silence all about him, to reply.

"The freetraders took him, sir," said Captain Fawcett. Then he nodded twice, deprecatingly; next he waved a hand, took up his goblet again, drank off its remaining contents in the sustained, pregnant silence, and again turned to Saul's father.

Settling himself somewhat more comfortably in his chair, he then proceeded to relate, with precise circumstantial detail, exactly what had actually taken place, only substituting for himself as the captor the name of the dreaded Jacob Brenner, who, like himself, had a place of refuge among the Andros creeks, and whom Captain Fawcett regarded with profound and bitter detestation as his principal rival.

He told his story through in the atmosphere of intense interest all about him. He made Captain Saul Maccartney pretend to join the cutthroat Brenner and, the wish greatly father to the thought, brought his long yarn to a successful conclusion with the doughty Saul staging a desperate hand-to-hand encounter with his captor after going ashore with him on Andros Island, together with a really artistic sketching-in of his escape from the pirate settlement in a dinghy through the intricacies of the mosquito infested creeks; and his ultimate harborage—"well nigh by

chance, or a trace of what he names 'the Maccartney luck', sir,"—with himself.

"I've a very pleasant little spot there on Andros," added Captain Fawcett.

Then, satisfying another accession of his whimsicality:

"I'm certain any of you would be pleased with it, gentlemen. It's been good—very good and pleasurable, I do assure you—to have had Captain Maccartney with me."

And Fawcett, the pirate, whose own longboat had fetched him ashore here from that very vessel whose capture by freetraders on the high seas he had just been so graphically recounting, with a concluding short bow and a flourish of the left hand, took up his recently replenished crystal goblet and, again facing the senior Maccartney, toasted him roundly on this, the glad occasion of his seafaring son's prosperous return.

SAUL MACCARTNEY walked rapidly across the crowded main thoroughfare so as to avoid being recognized and stopped. He turned up a precipitous, winding and abruptly cornered street of varying width, and, following it between the many closely walled residences among which it wound, mounted at a rapid stride to a point two-thirds of the way up the hill. Here he paused to readjust his clothes and finally to wipe the sweat induced by his pace from his bronzed face with another fine cambric handkerchief like that being used by his colleague about this time down there at Le Coq d'Or. The two of them had divided evenly four dozen of these handkerchiefs not long before from the effects of a dandified French supercargo now feeding the fishes.

It was a very sultry day in the middle of the month of May, in that Spring period when the *rata* drums of the negroes may be heard booming nightly from the wooded hills in the interior of the islands; when the annual shift in the direction of the trade wind between the points east and west of north seems to hang a curtain of sultriness over St. Thomas on its three hillsides. It was one of those days when the burros' tongues hang out of dry mouths as they proceed along dusty roads; when centipedes leave their native dust and boldly cross the floors of houses; when ownerless dogs slink along the inner edges of the baking, narrow sidewalks in the slits of house shade away from the sun.

Saul Maccartney had paused near the entrance to the spacious mansion of his uncle, Thomas Lanigan Maccartney, which stood behind a stately grille of wrought iron eleven feet high, in its own grounds, and was approached through a wide gateway above which the cut stone arch supported a plaque on which had been carved the Maccartney arms. Through this imposing entrance, his face now comfortably dry and his fine broadcloth coat readjusted to his entire satisfaction, Saul Maccartney now entered and proceeded along the broad, shell strewn path with its two borders of cemented pink conch shells toward the mansion.

Through the accident of being his father's first born son and the rigid application of the principle of primogeniture which had always prevailed among the Maccartney clan in the matter of inheritances, old T. L. Maccartney possessed the bulk of the solid Maccartney family fortune. He had married the only daughter of a retired Danish general who had been governor of the colony. Dying in office, the general had left behind him the memory of a sound administration and another substantial fortune which found its way through that connection into the Maccartney coffers.

The only reason why Saul Maccartney had not led his heavenly endowed cousin, Camilla, to the altar long before, was merely because he knew he could marry her any time. Camilla's lips had parted and her blue eyes become mysterious, soft and melting, at every sight of him since about the time that she was eight and he ten. As for Saul

Maccartney, he could not remember the time when it had not been his settled intention to marry his cousin Camilla when he got ready. He was as sure of her as of the rising and setting of the sun; as that failure was a word without meaning to him; as that the Santa Cruz rum was and always would be the natural drink of gentlemen and sailors.

Jens Sorensen, the black butler, who had witnessed his arrival, had the door open with a flourish when Saul was halfway between the gate and the gallery. His bow as this favored guest entered the house was profound enough to strain the seams of his green broadcloth livery coat.

But black Jens received no reward for his assiduousness from the returned prodigal, beyond a nod. This was not like Saul in the least, but black Jens understood perfectly why Captain Maccartney had not quizzed him, paused to slap mightily his broad back under his green coat, or to tweak the lobe of his right ear ornamented with its heavy ring of virgin gold, all of which attentions black Jens could ordinarily expect from this fine gentleman of his family's close kinfolk. There had been no time for such persiflage.

For, hardly had black Jens' huge, soft right hand begun the motion of closing the great door, when Camilla Maccartney, apprised by some subtlety of "the grapevine route" of her cousin's arrival, appeared on the threshold of the mansion's great drawing room, her lips parted, her eyes suffused with an inescapable emotion. Only momentarily she paused there. Then she was running toward him across the polished mahogany flooring of the wide hallway, and had melted into the firm clasp of Saul Maccartney's brawny arms. Raising her head, she looked up into his face adoringly and Saul, responding, bent and kissed her long and tenderly. No sound save that occasioned by the soft footed retirement of black Jens to his pantry broke the cool silence of the dignified hall. Then at last in a voice from Camilla Maccartney that was little above a whisper:

"Saul—Saul, my darling! I am so glad, so glad! You will tell me all that transpired—later, Saul, my dear. Oh, it has been a dreadful time for me."

Withdrawing herself very gently from his embrace, she turned and, before the great Copenhagen mirror against the hallway's south wall, made a small readjustment in her coiffure—her hair was of the purest, clearest Scandinavian gold, of a spun silk fineness. Beckoning her lover to follow, she then led the way into the mansion's drawing room.

As they entered, Camilla a step in advance of Maccartney, there arose from a mahogany and rose-satin davenport the thickset figure of a handsome young man of about twenty-four, arrayed in the scarlet coat of his Brittanic Majesty's line regiments of infantry. This was Captain the Honorable William McMillin, who, as a freshly commissioned coronet-of-horse, had actually fought under Wellington at Waterloo ten years before. Recently he had attained his captaincy, and sold out to undertake here in the Danish West Indies the resident management of a group of Santa Crucian sugar estates, the property of his Scottish kinsfolk, the Comyns.

These two personable captains, one so-called because of his courtesy title, and the other with that honorable seafaring title really forfeited, were duly presented to each other by Camilla Maccartney; and thereby was consummated another long stride forward in the rapid march of Saul Maccartney's hovering doom.

The Scottish officer, sensing Saul's claim upon that household, retired ere long with precisely the correct degree of formality.

AS SOON as he was safely out of earshot Camilla Maccartney rose and, seizing a small hassock, placed it near her cousin's feet. Seating herself on this, she looked up adoringly into his face

and, her whole soul in her eyes, begged him to tell her what had happened since the day when he had cleared the *Hope* from Barranquilla.

Again Saul Maccartney rushed forward upon his fate.

He told her, with circumstantial detail, the cooked-up story of shipwreck, including a touching piece of invention about three days and nights in the *Hope's* boats and his timely rescue by his new friend, Fawcett, master of the *Swallow*—a very charitable gentleman, proprietor of a kind of trading station on Andros in the Bahamas. Captain Fawcett, who had considerately brought the prodigal back to St. Thomas, was at the moment being entertained in Le Coq d'Or.

Camilla Maccartney's eyes grew wide at the name of Saul's rescuer. The first intimation of her subsequent change of attitude began with her exclamation:

"Saul! Not—not Captain Fawcett, the pirate! Not that dreadful man! I had always understood that *his* lying-up place was on the Island of Andros, among the creeks!"

Saul Maccartney lied easily, reassuringly. He turned upon his cousin—anxious, now, as he could see, and troubled—the full battery of his engaging personality. He showed those beautiful teeth of his in a smile that would have melted the heart of a Galatea.

Camilla dropped the subject, entered upon a long explication of her happiness, her delight at having him back. He must remain for breakfast. Was his friend and benefactor, Captain Fawcett, suitably housed? He might, of course, stay here—father would be so delighted at having him . . .

It was as though she were attempting, subconsciously, to annihilate her first faint doubt of her cousin Saul, in this enthusiasm for his rescuer. She rose and ran across the room, and jerked violently upon the ornamental bell rope. In almost immediate response to her ring black Jens entered the room softly, bowed before his mistress with a suggestion of prostrating himself.

"A place for Captain Maccartney at the breakfast table. Champagne; two bottles—no, four—of the 1801 Chablis—Is Miranda well along with the shell-crustadas?"

Again Camilla Maccartney was reassured. All these commands would be precisely carried out.

Thereafter for a space, indeed, until the noon breakfast was announced, conversation languished between the cousins. For the first time in his life, had Saul Maccartney been to the slightest degree critically observant, he would have detected in Camilla's bearing a vague hint that her mind toward him was not wholly at rest: but of this he noticed nothing. As always, and especially now under the stimulation of this curious game of bravado he and Fawcett were playing here in St. Thomas, no warning, no sort of premonition, had penetrated the thick veneer of his selfishness, his fatuous conviction that any undertaking of his must necessarily proceed to a successful outcome.

He sat there thinking of how well he had managed things; of the chances of the *Swallow's* next venture on the Main; of the ripe physical beauty of Camilla; of various women here in the town . . .

And Camilla Maccartney, beautiful, strangely composed, exquisitely dressed, as always, sat straight upright across from him, and looked steadily at her cousin, Saul Maccartney. It was as though she envisaged vaguely how he was to transform her love into black hatred. A thin shadow of pain lay across her own Irish-blue eyes . . .

Captain the Honorable William McMillin, like many other personable young gentlemen before him, had been very deeply impressed with the quality of Camilla Maccartney. But it was not only that West Indian gentlewoman's social graces and cool blond beauty that were responsible for this favorable impression. The young captain, a thoroughly hard headed Scot with very much more behind his handsome

forehead than the necessary knowledge of military tactics possessed by the ordinary line regiment officer, had been even more deeply impressed by other qualities obviously possessed by his West Indian hostess. Among these was her intellect; unusual, he thought, in a colonial lady not yet quite twenty-eight. Nothing like Miss Maccartney's control of the many servants of the household had ever seemed possible to the captain.

From black Jens, the butler, to the third scullery maid, all of them, as they came severally under the notice of this guest, appeared to accord her a reverence hardly distinguishable from acts of worship. In going about the town with her, either walking for early evening exercise or in her father's barouche to make or return formal calls, the trained and observant eye of the young Scotsman had not failed to notice her effect upon the swarming negro population of the town.

Obeisances from these marked her passage among them. The gay stridency of their street conversations lulled itself and was still at her passing.

Doffed hats, bows, veritable obeisances in rows and by companies swayed these street loiterers as her moving about among them left them hushed and worshipful in her wake.

Captain McMillin noted the very general respectful attitude of these blacks toward their white overlords, but, his eyes told him plainly, they appeared to regard Camilla Maccartney as a kind of divinity.

In the reasonable desire to satisfy his mounting curiosity Captain McMillin had broached the matter to his hostess. A canny Scot, he had approached this matter indirectly. His initial questions had had to do with native manners and customs, always a safe general topic in a colony.

Camilla's direct answers had at once surprised him with their clarity and the exactitude of their information. It was unusual and—as the subject broadened out between them and Camilla told him more and more about the negroes, their beliefs, their manner of life, their customs and practises—it began to be plain to Captain McMillin that it was more than unusual; if some one entitled to do so had asked him his opinion on Camilla Maccartney's grasp of this rather esoteric subject, and the captain had answered freely and frankly, he would have been obliged to admit that it seemed to him uncanny.

For behind those social graces of hers which made Camilla Maccartney a notable figure in the polite society of this Danish Colonial capital, apart from the distinction of her family connection, her commanding position as the richest heiress in the colony, her acknowledged intellectual attainments, and the distinguished beauty of face and form which lent a pervading graciousness to her every act, Camilla Maccartney was almost wholly occupied by two consuming interests.

Of these, the first, generally known by every man, woman and child in St. Thomas, was her preoccupation with her cousin, Saul Maccartney. The other, unsuspected by any white person in or out of Camilla Maccartney's wide acquaintance, was her knowledge of the magic of the negroes.

This subject had been virtually an obsession with her since childhood. Upon it she had centered her attention, concentrated her fine mind and, using every possible opportunity which her independent position and the enormous amount of material at hand afforded, had mastered it in theory and practise throughout its almost innumerable ramifications.

THERE was, first, the Obeah. This, deriving originally from the Ashantee slaves, had come into the West Indes through the gate of Jamaica. It was a combined system of magical formulas and the use of drugs. Through it a skilful practitioner could obtain extraordinary re-

sults. It involved a very complete *materia medica,* and a background setting for the usage and practise thereof, which reached back through uncounted centuries into rituals that were the very heart of primitive savagery.

The much more greatly extended affair called Voodoo, an extraordinarily complex fabric of "black", "white", and revelatory occultism, had made its way through the islands chiefly through the Haitian doorway from its proximate source, Dahomey, whence the early French colonists of Hispaniola had brought their original quotas of black slaves.

Voodoo, an infinitely broader and more stratified system than the medicinal Obeah, involved much that appeared to the average white person mere superficial negro "stupidness". But in its deeper and more basic aspects it included many very terrible things, which Camilla Maccartney had encountered, succeeded in understanding, and appropriated into this terrific fund of black learning which was hers as this fell subject took her through the dim backgrounds of its origin to the unspeakable snake worship of Africa's blackest and deadliest interior.

The considerable negro population of the island, from the most fanatical *Hougan* presiding in the high hills over the dire periodic rites of the "baptism" and the slaughter of goats and bullocks and willingly offered human victims whose blood, mingled with red rum, made that unholy communion out of which grew the unnameable orgies of the deep interior heights, down to the lowliest pickanniny gathering fruits or stealing yams for the sustenance of his emaciated body—every one of these blacks was aware of this singular preoccupation; acknowledged the supremacy of this extraordinarily gifted white lady; paid her reverence; feared her acknowledged powers; would as soon have lopped off a foot as to cross her lightest wish.

Captain the Honorable William McMillin made up his mind that her grasp of these matters was extraordinary. His questionings and Camilla's informative replies had barely touched upon the edge of what she knew.

And the former captain, her cousin, Saul Maccartney, did not know that his heiress cousin cherished any interest except that which she had always demonstrated so plainly in his own direction.

Going in to breakfast, Saul Maccartney was nearly knocked off his feet by the physical impact of his uncle's greeting. Camilla's father had been spending the morning overlooking a property of his east of the town, in the direction of Smith's Bay. He had thus missed meeting Saul at Le Coq d'Or, but had learned of his nephew's arrival on his way home. The town, indeed, was agog with it.

So sustained was his enthusiasm, the more especially after imbibing his share of the unusually large provision of wine for a midday meal which his daughter's desire to honor the occasion had provided, that he monopolized most of his nephew's attention throughout breakfast and later in the drawing room after the conclusion of that meal. It was perhaps because of this joviality on his uncle's part that Saul Maccartney failed to observe the totally new expression which had rested like a very small cloud on Camilla Maccartney's face ever since a short time before going into the dining room.

His uncle even insisted upon sending the prodigal home in the English barouche, and in this elegant equipage—with its sleek, Danish coach horses and the liveried negroes on its box with cockades at the sides of their glistening silk toppers—he made the brief journey down one hill, a short distance through the town, and up another one to his father's house.

Here, it being well after two o'clock in the afternoon, and siesta hour, he found Fawcett, whom the Old Man had taken under his hospitable wing. The two had no private conversation together. Both were in high spirits and

these Old Maccartney fostered with his cordials, his French brandy and a carafe of very ancient rum. The three men sat together over their liquor during the siesta hour, and during the session Old Maccartney did most of the talking. He did not once refer to his son's capture by Brenner, the freebooter.

He confined himself in his desire to be entertaining to his son's benefactor, Captain Fawcett, to a joyous succession of merry tales and ripe, antique quips. Saul Maccartney had therefore no reason to suspect, nor did it happen to occur to Fawcett to inform him, that the latter's account of Maccartney's adventures since the time he had last been heard from until the present was in any wise different from the tale of shipwreck upon which they had agreed and which Maccartney had told out in full to his cousin, Camilla.

The three had not finished their jovial session before various strange matters affecting them very nearly, odd rumors, now being discussed avidly in various offices, residences, and gathering places about St. Thomas, were gathering headway, taking on various characteristic exaggerations and, indeed, running like wildfire through the town.

In a place like St. Thomas, crossroads and clearing house of the vast West Indian trade which came and went through that port and whose prosperity was dependent almost wholly upon shipping, even the town's riff-raff was accustomed to think and express itself in terms of ships.

IT WAS an unimportant, loquacious negro youth who started the ball a-rolling. This fellow, a professional diver, came up to one of the wharves in his slab-sided, home-made rowboat where he lounged aft, submitting to the propulsion of his coal-black younger brother, a scrawny lad of twelve. This wharf rat had had himself rowed out to the vessel from which the two notables he had observed had come ashore that morning. It was from the lips of this black ne'er-do-well that various other wharfside loiterers learned that the beautiful clipper vessel lying out there at anchor was provided with eight carronade ports.

Out of the idle curiosity thus initially aroused there proceeded various other harbor excursions in small boats. The black diver had somehow managed to miss the stanchion of the "long tom" which Fawcett, in an interval of prudence, had had dismounted the night before. The fact that the *Swallow* carried such an armament, however, very soon trickled ashore.

This nucleus of interesting information was soon followed up and almost eclipsed in interest by the various discussions and arguments which were soon running rife among the shipping interests of the town over the extraordinary numbers of the *Swallow's* crew.

A round dozen, together with the usual pair of mates to supplement the captain, as all these experts on ships were well aware, would ordinarily suffice for a vessel of this tonnage. Accounts and the terms of the various arguments varied between estimates ranging from seventy-five to a hundred men on board the *Swallow*.

A side issue within this category was also warmly discussed. Crews of vessels with home ports in the islands were commonly negro crews. This unprecedented gathering of men was a white group. Only two—certain of the debaters held out firmly that they had observed three—negroes were to be perceived aboard the *Swallow*, and one of these, a gigantic brown man who wore nothing but earrings and a pair of faded dungaree trousers, was plainly the cook in charge of the *Swallow's* galley, and the other, or others, were this fellow's assistants.

But the town got its real fillip from the quite definite statement of a small-fry worthy, one Jeems Pelman, who really gave them something to wrangle about when he came ashore after a visit

of scrutiny and stated flatly that this rakish, shining, black hulled clipper was none other vessel than the Maccartneys' *Hope*, upon both hull and rigging of which he had worked steadily for three months in his own shipyard when the *Hope* was built during the winter of 1819.

All these items of easily authenticated information bulked together and indicated to the comparatively unsophisticated, as well as to the wiseacres, only one possible conclusion. This was that the Maccartney vessel, in command of which Captain Saul Maccartney was known to have cleared from a South American port three months earlier, had in some as yet unexplained fashion been changed over into a freetrading ship and that the harsh featured seadog in his fine clothes who had accompanied Captain Maccartney ashore that morning could very well be none other than its commander.

A certain lapse of time is ordinarily requisite for the loquacious stage of drunkenness to overtake the average hard headed seafaring man. The crew of Fawcett's longboat, after three weeks' continuous duty at sea, had bestowed the boat safely, engaged the services of an elderly negro to watch it in their absence, and drifted into the low rum shop nearest their landing place; and there not long after their arrival Fawcett's boatswain, a Dutch island bruiser, had been recognized by several former acquaintances as a sailorman who had gone out of the harbor of St. Eustasia in a small trading schooner which had disappeared off the face of the wide Caribbean three years previously.

The rum-induced garrulity of this gentleman, as the report of it went forth and flared through the town, corroborated the as yet tentative conclusion that a fully manned pirate ship lay for the time being at anchor in the peaceful harbor of St. Thomas; and that its master, whose identity as a certain Captain Fawcett had spread downward through the social strata from Le Coq d'Or itself, was here ashore, hobnobbing with the town's high gentry, and actually a guest of the Maccartneys.

By three o'clock in the afternoon the town was seething with the news. There had been no such choice morsel to roll on the tongue since Henry Morgan had sacked the city of Panama.

The first corroboration of that vague, distressing, but as yet unformed suspicion which had lodged itself in Camilla Maccartney's mind came to her through Jens Sorensen, the butler. The "grapevine route", so called—that curious door-to-door and mouth-to-ear method of communication among the negroes of the community—is very rapid as well as very mysterious. Black Jens had heard this devastating story relayed up to him from the lowest black riff-raff of the town's waterfront a matter of minutes after the name of their guest, seeping downward from Le Coq d'Or, had met, mingled with, and crowned the damnatory group of successive details from the wharves.

To any one familiar with the effect of Voodoo upon the negro mentality there would be nothing surprising in the fact that black Jens proceeded straight to his mistress to whisper the story without any delay. For fear is the dominant note of the Voodooist. The St. Thomas negroes were actuated in their attitude toward Camilla Maccartney by something infinitely deeper than that superficial respect which Captain McMillin had noted. They feared her and her proven powers as they feared the dread demigod Damballa, tutelary manifestation of the unnamed Guinea-Snake himself.

For it was not as one who only inquires and studies that Camilla Maccartney commanded awe and reverence of the St. Thomas negroes. She had *practised* this extraordinary art and it was her results as something quite tangible, definite and unmistakable which formed the background of that vast respect, and which had brought black Jens cringing and trembling into her presence

on this particular occasion.

And black Jens had not failed to include in his report the drunken sailorman's leering account of that captive lady's treatment by Saul Maccartney—how an innocent young wife, off Nevis, had been outrageously forced into Saul's cabin, and when he had tired of her, how he had sent her back to the deck to go across the plank of death.

WHAT desolation penetrated deep and lodged itself there in Camilla Maccartney's soul can hardly be guessed at. From that moment she was convinced of the deep infamy of that entrancing lover-cousin of hers whom she had adored with her whole heart since the remoteness of her early childhood.

But, however poignantly indescribable, however extremely devastating, may have been her private feelings, it is certain that she did not retire as the typical gentlewoman of the period would have done to eat out her heart in solitary desolation.

Within ten minutes, on the contrary, in response to her immediately issued orders, the English barouche with its sleek Danish horses, its cockaded servants on the box, was carrying her down the hill, rapidly along through the town, and then the heavy coach horses were sweating up the other hill toward her uncle's house. If the seed of hatred, planted by Saul's duplicity, were already sprouting, nevertheless she would warn him. She dreaded meeting him.

Saul Maccartney, summoned away from the somewhat drowsy end of that afternoon's convivial session with Fawcett and the Old Man, found his cousin awaiting him near the drawing room door. She was standing, and her appearance was calm and collected. She addressed him directly, without preamble:

"Saul, it is known in the town. I came to warn you. It is running about the streets that this Captain Fawcett of yours is the pirate. One of his men has been recognized. He talked in one of the rum shops. They say that this ship is the *Hope,* altered into a different appearance. I advise you to go, Saul—go at once, while it is safe!"

Saul Maccartney turned his old disarming smile upon his cousin. He could feel the liquor he had drunk warming him, but his hard Irish head was reasonably clear. He was not befuddled. He stepped toward her as though impulsively, his bronzed face flushed from his recent potations, his arms extended and spread in a carefree gesture as though he were about to take her in his embrace.

"Camilla, *allana,* ye should not sadden your sweet face over the likes of me. I know well what I'm about, me darling. And as for Fawcett—well, as ye're aware of his identity, ye'll know that he can care for himself. Very suitably, very suitably indeed."

He had advanced very close upon her now, but she stood unmoving, the serious expression of her face not changed. She only held up a hand in a slight gesture against him, as though to warn him to pause and think. Again Saul Maccartney stepped lightly toward his doom.

"And may I not be having a kiss, Camilla?" His smiling face was unperturbed, his self-confidence unimpaired even now. Then, fatally, he added, "And now that ye're here, *acushla,* why should ye not have me present my friend, the captain? 'Twas he, ye'll remember, that brought me back to ye. I could be fetching him within the moment."

But Camilla Maccartney merely looked at him with a level gaze.

"I am going now," she said, ignoring his suggestion and the crass insult to her gentility involved in it, and which beneath her calm exterior had outraged her and seared her very soul. The seed was growing apace. "I have warned you, Saul."

She turned and walked out of the room and out of the house; then across the tiled gallery and down the black

marble steps, and out to her carriage.

Saul Maccartney hastened back to his father and Fawcett. Despite his incurable bravado, motivated as always by his deep seated selfishness, he had simply accepted the warning just given him at its face value. He addressed his drowsing father after a swift, meaningful glance at Fawcett:

"We shall be needing the carriage, sir, if so be it's agreeable to ye. We must be getting back on board, it appears, and I'll be hoping to look in on ye again in the morning, sir."

And without waiting for any permission, and ignoring his father's liquor muffled protests against this abrupt departure, Saul Maccartney rang the bell, ordered the family carriage to be waiting in the shortest possible time, and pressed a rix-dollar into the negro butler's hand as an incentive to hasten the process.

Within a quarter of an hour, after hasty farewells to the tearful and now well befuddled Old Man, these two precious scoundrels were well on their way through the town toward the jetty where they had landed, and where, upon arrival, they collected their boat's crew out of the rum shop with vigorous revilings and not a few hearty clouts, and were shortly speeding across the turquoise and indigo waters of St. Thomas harbor toward the anchored *Swallow*.

Inside half an hour from their going up over her side and the hoisting of the longboat, the *Swallow*, without reference to the harbormaster, clearance, or any other formality, was picking her lordly way daintily out past Cowell's Battery at the harbor mouth, and was soon lost to the sight of all curious watchers in the welcoming swell of the Caribbean.

This extraordinary visit of the supposedly long drowned Captain Maccartney to his native town, and the circumstances accompanying it, was a nine-days' wonder in St. Thomas. The widespread discussion it provoked died down after awhile, it being supplanted in current interest by the many occurrences in so busy a port-of-call. It was not, of course, forgotten, although it dropped out of mind as a subject for acute debate.

Such opinion as remained after the arguments had been abandoned was divided opinion. Could the vessel possibly have been the Maccartneys' *Hope?* Was this Captain Fawcett who had brought Saul Maccartney ashore Captain Fawcett, the pirate? Had Captain Saul Maccartney really thrown in his lot with freetraders, or was such a course unthinkable on his part?

The yarn which Captain Fawcett had spun in Le Coq d'Or seemed the reasonable explanation—if it were true. In the face of the fact that no other counter-explanation had been definitely put forward by anybody, this version was tacitly accepted by St. Thomas society; but with the proviso, very generally made and very widely held, that this fellow must have been *the* Captain Fawcett after all. Saul Maccartney had either been fooled by him, or else Saul's natural gratitude had served to cover, in his estimation of the fellow, any observed shortcomings on the part of this rescuer and friend-in-need.

Camilla Maccartney made no allusion whatever, even within the family circle, to the story Saul had told *her*. She was not, of course, called upon to express any opinion outside. She was quite well aware that both versions were falsehoods.

She faced bravely, though with a sorely empty and broken heart, all her manifold social obligations in the town. Indeed, somewhat to distract her tortured mind, wherein that seed of hate was by now growing into a lusty plant, the heiress of the Maccartney fortune engaged herself rather more fully than usual that Summer season in the various current activities. She forced herself to a greater preoccupation than ever in her attention to her occult pursuits. She even took up afresh the oil painting, long ago abandoned by her, which had been one of her early "accomplishments".

It was during this period—a very dreadful one for her, succeeding as it did, abruptly, upon her momentary happiness at her cousin Saul's restoration to the land of the living which had dissipated her acute and sustained grief over his presumptive loss at sea in the *Hope*—that she undertook, with what obscure premonitory motive derived from curious skill in the strange and terrible arts of the black people can only be darkly surmised—another and very definite task.

This was the painting of a panoramic view of the town as seen from the harbor. At this she toiled day after day from the awninged afterdeck of one of the smaller Maccartney packet vessels. This boat had been anchored to serve her purpose at the point of vantage she had selected. She worked at her panorama in the clear, pure light of many early Summer mornings. Before her on the rather large canvas she had chosen for this purpose there gradually grew into objectivity the wharves, the public buildings, the fort, the three hills with their red roofed mansions, set amid decorative trees. Her almost incredible industry was, really, a symptom of the strange obsession now beginning to invade her reason. Camilla Maccartney had suffered a definite mental lesion.

THE scrupulous courtesy of the St. Thomians, that graceful mantle of manners which has never been allowed to wear thin, was unobtrusively interposed between the respected Maccartneys and the dreadful scandal which had reached out and touched their impeccable family garment of respectability. By no word spoken, by no overt act, by not so much as a breath were they reminded of Captain Maccartney's recent visit ashore or his hasty and irregular departure. Captain McMillin, therefore, as a guest of Camilla's father, heard nothing of it. He sensed, however, a certain indefinite undercurrent of family trouble and, yielding to this sure instinct, ended his visit with all the niceties of high breeding and departed for Santa Cruz.

Just before he left, on the morning after the farewell dinner which had been given as a final gesture in his honor, the captain managed to convey to Camilla the measure of his appreciation. He placed, as it were, his sword at her disposal! It was very nicely made—that gesture of gallantry. It was not to be mistaken for the preliminary to a possible later offer of marriage. It was anything but braggadocio. And it was somehow entirely appropriate to the situation. The handsome, upstanding captain left with his hostess precisely the impression he intended; that is, he left her the feeling that here was an adequate person to depend upon in a pinch, and that she had been invited to depend upon him should the pinch come.

A THIRD of the way up one of the low mountains northward and behind the three gentle hills on the southern slopes of which the ancient city of St. Thomas is built, there stood—and still stands—a small stone gentry residence originally built in the middle of the eighteenth century by an exiled French family which had taken refuge in this kindly Danish colony and played at raising vanilla up there on their airy little estate overlooking the town and the sea.

This place was still known by its original name of Ma Folie—a title early bestowed upon it by Mme. la Marquise, who had looked up at it through a window in her temporary apartment in the Hôtel du Commerce, in the town, while the roofing was being placed upon her new house, there and then assuring herself that only perched upon the back of one of those diminutive burros which cluttered up the town streets could any one like herself possibly manage the ascent to such a site.

Ma Folie was now one of the many Maccartney properties. It belonged to Camilla, having come to her as a portion

of her maternal inheritance, and upon it she had reestablished the vanilla planting, helped out by several freshly cleared acres in cocoa. No donkey was required nowadays to convey a lady up the tortuous, steep, little trail from the town to Ma Folie. A carriage road led past its unpretentious square entrance posts of whitewashed, cemented stone, and when Camilla Maccartney visited her hillside estate the English barouche carried her there, the long climb causing the heavy coach horses to sweat mightily and helping, as the coal-black coachman said, to keep them in condition.

It was up here that she had long ago established what might be called her laboratory. It was at Ma Folie, whose village housed only negroes selected by herself as her tenant-laborers, that she had, in the course of years, brought her practise of the "strange art" to its perfection. She had for some time now confined her practise to meeting what might be called charitable demands upon her.

Talismans to protect; amulets to attract or repel; potent ouangas—only such modest products of the fine art of Voodoo as these went out from that occult workshop of hers at Ma Folie—went out into the eager, outstretched hands of the afflicted whose manifold plights had engaged Camilla Maccartney's sympathy; to the relief of those abject ones who called upon her, in fear and trembling, as their last resort against who knows what obscure devilish attacks, what outrageous charmings, wrought by that inimical ruthlessness of one negro to another which Caucasians hardly suspect.

No vanilla pod, no single cocoa bean, had been stolen from Ma Folie estate since Camilla Maccartney had planted it afresh nine years before . . .

IT WAS at about ten o'clock in the morning of a day near the middle of August that a kind of tremor of emotion ran through the town of St. Thomas, a matter of minutes after a report of the official watcher and the many other persons in the town and along the wharves whose sustained interest in shipping matters caused their eyes to turn ever and anon toward the wide harbor mouth. The *Swallow*, which three months before had literally run away, ignoring all the niceties of a ship's departure from any port and even the official leavetaking, was coming in brazenly, lilting daintily along under the stiff trade, her decks visibly swarming with the many members of her efficient and numerous crew.

She came up into the wind like a little man-o'-war, jauntily, her sails coming down simultaneously with a precision to warm the hearts of those ship wise watchers, her rigging slatting with reports like musket shots, the furling and stowing of canvas a truly marvelous demonstration of the efficiency which now reigned aft.

These details of rapid fire seamanship, swiftly as they were being handled, were as yet incomplete when the longboat went straight down from its davits into the water and Saul Maccartney followed his boat's crew over the side and picked up his tiller ropes.

The *Swallow's* anchorage this time was closer in, and it seemed no time at all to the thronging, gaping watchers on the jetty before he sprang ashore and was up the steps. There was no rum shop for the boat's crew this time. Without their officer's even looking back at them over his shoulder the oarsmen pushed off, turned about and rowed back to the *Swallow*.

Saul Maccartney was, if possible, even more debonair than ever. His self-confident smile adorned his even more heavily bronzed face. He was hatless, as usual, and his handsome figure was mightily set off by a gaily sprigged waistcoat and a ruffled shirt of fine cambric which showed between the silver braided lapels of the maroon colored coat of French cloth with a deep velvet collar, the pantaloons of which, matching the coat's cloth, were strapped under

a pair of low boots of very shining black leather.

The throng on the jetty was plainly in a different mood as compared to the vociferous, welcoming mob of three months before. They stayed close together in a little phalanx this time and from them came fewer welcoming smiles.

Plainly sensing this, Saul Maccartney bestowed on this riff-raff of the wharves no more than a passing glance of smiling raillery. He passed them and entered the town with rapid, purposeful strides as though intent on some very definite business and, utterly ignoring the hum of released though muted conversation which rose behind him as though from an aroused swarm of bees, entered the main thoroughfare, turned sharply to his left along it, proceeded in this direction some forty feet, and turned into the small office of one Axel Petersen, a purveyor of ships' stores.

Blond, stout, genial Axel Petersen stared from his broad, comfortable desk at this entrance and allowed his lower jaw to sag. Then he rose uncertainly to his feet and his four neatly garbed mulatto clerks rose from their four respective high stools with him and, in precise conformity with their employer's facial reaction, their four pairs of mottled-iris eyes rounded out altogether like saucers, and their four lower jaws sagged in unison.

Saul Maccartney threw back his head and laughed aloud. Then, addressing Petersen:

"Axel, Axel! I wouldn't've thought it of ye! 'Tis but stores I'm after, man—vast stores, the likes of which ye might be selling in the course of a week to five vessels, if so be ye had the fortune to get that many all in one week!" Then, a shade more seriously, "'Tis pork I want; beans, coffee in sacks, limes by the gunny sack—a hundred and one things, all of them written down to save ye trouble, ye great, feckless porker! And here—beside the list which I'm handing ye now—is the reassurance—"

And Saul Maccartney, thrusting his list of ship's supplies neatly printed on a long slip of paper under the nose of the stultified Petersen, slapped down upon the desk top beside it the bulging purse which he had hauled out of the tail pocket of his beautiful, maroon colored French coat.

"There's two hundred and fifty English sovereigns there forninst ye, Axel. Ye can have it counted out or do it yourself, and if that does not suffice to cover the list, why, there's another shot in the locker behind it, ye *omadhoun*— ye fat robber of pettifogging ships' stewards!"

And before the protruding, bemused blue eyes of portly Axel Petersen Saul Maccartney shook banteringly a thick sheaf of Bank of England ten-pound notes. By the time he had returned these to the same capacious pocket, he was at the door, had paused, turned and, leaning for an instant nonchalantly against its jamb, remarked—

"Ye're to have the stores piled on your wharf not an instant later than two o'clock this day." Then, the bantering smile again to the fore, and shaking a long, shapely forefinger toward the goggling dealer in ships' stores, he added, "Ye'll observe, Axel, I'm not taking your stores by force and arms. I'm not sacking the town—this time!"

Then Saul Maccartney was gone, and Axel Petersen, muttering unintelligibly as he assembled his scattered wits and those of his four clerks, the heavy purse clutched tightly by its middle in one pudgy hand, and the long list of the *Swallow's* required stores held a little unsteadily before his nearsighted blue eyes, methodically began the process of getting this enormous order assembled.

IT WAS with a perfectly calm exterior that Camilla Maccartney received her cousin Saul a quarter of an hour later. The turmoil beneath this prideful reserve might, perhaps, be guessed at; but as the art of guessing had never formed any part of Saul Maccartney's mental equipment, he

made no effort in that direction.

He began at once with his usual self-confident directness upon what he had come to say.

"Camilla, *acushla,* I've come to ye in haste, 'tis true, and I'm asking your indulgence for that. 'Twas gracious of ye, as always, to be here at home when I chanced to arrive.

"I'll go straight to the point, if so be ye have no objections to make, and say in plain words what I well know to have been in the hearts of the two of us this many a year. I'm askin' ye now, Camilla—I'm begging ye with my whole soul to say that ye'll drive down with me now, Camilla, to the English Church, and the two of us be married, and then sail with me for the truly magnificent home I've been establishing for ye over on Andros."

Camilla Maccartney continued to sit, outwardly unmoved, where she had received him when black Jens had shown him into the drawing room. She had not been looking at her cousin during this characteristically confident and even impulsive declaration of his. Her eyes were upon her hands which lay, lightly clasped, in her lap, and she did not raise them to reply. She did not, however, keep him waiting. She said, in a perfectly level voice in which there was apparently no single trace or indication of the tearing, internal emotion which surged through her outraged heart at this last and unforgivable insult—

"I shall not become your wife, Saul—now or ever."

Then, as he stood before her, his buoyant self-confidence for once checked, his face suddenly configured into something like the momentary grotesqueness of Axel Petersen's, she added, in that same level tone, which had about it now, however, the smallest suggestion of a rising inflection:

"Do not come to me again. Go now—at once."

This final interview with her cousin Saul was unquestionably the element which served to crystallize into an active and sustained hatred the successive emotional crises and their consequent abnormal states of mind which the events here recorded had stirred up within this woman so terribly equipped for vengeance. The seed of hatred was now a full grown plant.

Upon a woman of Camilla Maccartney's depth and emotional capacity the felonious behavior of Saul Maccartney had had a very terrible, and a very deep reaching, mental effect. She had adored and worshiped him for as long as she could remember. He had torn down and riven apart and left lying about her in brutally shattered fragments the whole structure of her life. He had smashed the solid pride of her family into shreds. He had disgraced himself blatantly, deliberately, with a ruthless abandon. He had piled insult to her upon insult. He had taken her pure love for him, crushed and defiled it.

And now these irresistible blows had had the terrible effect of breaking down the serene composure of this gentlewoman. All her love for her cousin and all her pride in him were transformed into one definite, flaming and consuming purpose: She must wipe out those dreadful stains!

ARRIVED in the empty library, Camilla Maccartney went straight to the great rosewood desk, and without any delay wrote a letter. The black footman who hurried with this missive down the hill actually passed Saul Maccartney, likewise descending it. Within a very short time after its reception the captain of the little packet-vessel—upon which, anchored quite close to shore, Camilla Maccartney had been painting her now nearly finished panorama of the town—had gone ashore to round up his full crew. The packet itself, with Camilla Maccartney on board, sailed out of St. Thomas harbor that afternoon in plain sight of the restocked *Swallow,* whose great spread of gleaming white

canvas showed gloriously under the afternoon's sun as she laid her course due southwest. The packet, laying hers to the southward, rolled and tossed at a steady eight-knot clip under the spanking trade, straight for the Island of Santa Cruz.

Captain the Honorable William McMillin was summoned from his seven o'clock dinner in his estate house up in the gentle hills of the island's north side, and only his phlegmatic Scottish temperament, working together with his aristocratic self-control, prevented *his* shapely jaw from sagging and his blue eyes from becoming saucer-like when they had recorded for him the identity of this wholly unexpected visitor. Camilla Maccartney wasted none of the captain's time, nor was her arrival cause for any cooling of the excellent repast from which he had arisen to receive her.

"I have not," said she downrightly, in response to the astonished captain's initial inquiry as to whether she had dined. "And," she added, "I should be glad to sit down with you at once, if that meets your convenience, sir. It is, as you may very well have surmised, a very deep and pressing matter upon which I have ventured to come to you. That, I should imagine, would best be discussed while we sit at table, and so without delay."

Again the captain demonstrated his admirable manners. He merely bowed and led the way to the door of his dining room.

Once seated opposite Captain McMillin, Camilla Maccartney again went straight to her point. The captain quite definitely forgot to eat in the amazing and immediate interest of what she proceeded to say.

"I am offering the reward of a thousand English sovereigns for the apprehension at sea and the bringing to St. Thomas for their trials of the freetrader, Fawcett, and his mates. It may very well be no secret to you, sir, that a member of our family is one of these men. I think that any comment between us upon that subject will be a superfluity. You will take note, if you please, that it is I, a member of our family, who offer the reward I have named for his apprehension. You will understand—everything that is involved.

"Earlier this day it was proposed to me that I should sail away upon a ship without very much notice. I have come here to you, sir, on one of my father's vessels—Captain Stewart, her commander, a trusted man in our employ, has accompanied me all the way to your door. He is here now, waiting in the hired *calèche* which I secured in Frederiksted for the drive here to your house. Perhaps you will be good enough to have some food taken to him.

"I have come, Captain McMillin, in all this haste, actually to request you to do the same thing that I mentioned—you made me see, when you were our guest, that I could wholly rely upon you, sir. I am here to ask you, as a military man, to command the expedition which I am sending out. I am asking you to sail back with Captain Stewart and me for St. Thomas—tonight."

Captain McMillin looked at Camilla Maccartney across the length of his glistening mahogany dining table. He had been listening very carefully to her speech. He rang his table bell now that he was sure she was finished, and when his serving man answered this summons, ordered him to prepare a repast for the waiting ship's captain, and to send in to him his groom. Then, with a bow to his guest, and pushing back his chair and rising, he said:

"You will excuse me, Miss Maccartney, I trust, for the little time I shall require to pack. It will not occupy me very long."

IV

THE story of how the *Hyperion*, newest and swiftest of all the Maccartney vessels, was outfitted and armed for the pursuit and capture of Captain Fawcett is a little epic in

itself. It would include among the many details extant the intensive search among the shipping resources of St. Thomas, for the swivel-gun which, two days after Captain McMillin's arrival on the scene, was being securely bolted through the oak timbers of the *Hyperion's* afterdeck.

A surprisingly complete record of this extraordinary piece of activity survives among the ancient colonial archives. Perhaps the recording clerk of the period, in his Government House office, was, like every one else in St. Thomas, fascinated by the ruthless swiftness with which that job, under the impact of Camilla Maccartney's eye, was pushed through to a successful conclusion in precisely forty-eight hours. Nothing like this rate of speed had ever been heard of, even in St. Thomas. The many men engaged in this herculean task at Pelman's Shipyard worked day and night continuously in three eight-hour shifts.

It is significant that these shipwrights and other skilled artisans were all negroes. They had assembled in their scores and dozens from every quarter of the widespread town, irrespective of age or the exactions of their current employment from the instant that the grapevine route spread through the black population of the town the summons to this task which Camilla Maccartney had quietly uttered in the ear of her butler, Jens Sorensen.

The *Hyperion,* under the command of her own officers but with the understanding that Captain McMillin was in sole charge of the expedition, came up with the *Swallow* a little under four days from the hour of her sailing out of St. Thomas harbor.

Captain McMillin caught Fawcett at a vast disadvantage. The *Swallow,* very lightly manned at the moment, hung in stays, her riding sails flapping with reports like pistol shots as her graceful head was held into the wind. She lay some ten shiplengths away to the leeward of an American merchant vessel about which the *Swallow's* boats—now nine in number—were grouped, a single member of the crew in each. Fawcett and his two lieutenants, and nine-tenths of his crew of cutthroats, were ransacking their prize, whose officers, crew and passengers had been disposed of under nailed hatches. They appeared, indeed, to be so thoroughly occupied in this nefarious work as to have ignored entirely any preparations for meeting the *Hyperion's* attack—a circumstance sufficiently strange to have impressed Captain McMillin profoundly.

The *Hyperion's* officers, unable to account for this singular quiescence on the part of the pirates, attributed it to their probably failing to suspect that the *Hyperion* was anything but another trading vessel which had happened to blunder along on her course into this proximity. With a strange, quick gripping at the heart, quite new in his experience, Captain McMillin permitted himself to suspect, though for a brief instant only, that something of the strange power which he had glimpsed in his contacts with Camilla Maccartney, might in some extraordinary fashion be somehow responsible for this phenomenon.

But this thought, as too utterly ridiculous for harborage in a normal man's mind, he put away from him instanter.

The strategy of the situation appeared to be simple. And Captain McMillin formulated his plan of attack accordingly, after a brief consultation with his officers.

Realizing that there could be no effective gunnery from the handful of men in charge of the *Swallow,* Captain McMillin ordered a dozen men in charge of the *Hyperion's* second mate over the side in the largest of the boats. The maneuver of dropping an already manned boat from the davits—a risky undertaking in any event—was handled successfully, an exceptionally quiet sea contributing to the management of this piece of seamanship.

This boat's crew, all negroes and all armed with the pistols and cutlasses which had been hastily served out to

them, had no difficulty whatever in getting over the *Swallow's* side and making themselves masters of the pirate vessel. The dozen negroes had butchered the seven members of the pirate crew left on board the *Swallow* within forty seconds of their landing upon her deck, and Mr. Matthews, the officer in charge of them, hauled down with his own hand the Jolly Roger which, true to the freetrading traditions of the Main, flaunted at the *Swallow's* main peak.

The magnificent cooperation of the fifteen negroes constituting the *Hyperion's* deck crew made possible the next daring piece of seamanship which the *Hyperion's* captain had agreed to attempt. This was Captain McMillin's plan. The *Hyperion* should lay alongside the American vessel, grapple to her and board—with all hands—from deck to deck. This idea, almost unheard of in modern sea warfare, had suggested itself as practicable in this instance to Captain McMillin, from his reading. Such had been the tactics of the antique Mediterranean galleys.

For the purpose of retaining the outward appearance of a simple trader, Captain McMillin had concealed the thirty-three additional members of his heavily armed crew, and these had not been brought on deck until he was almost ready to have the grapples thrown. These reserves now swarmed upon the *Hyperion's* deck in the midst of a bedlam of shouts, yells and curses, punctuated by pistol shots, from the pirate crew on board their prize.

These were taken at a vast disadvantage. Their prize vessel was immobile. They had, for what appeared to Captain McMillin some inexplicable reason, apparently failed until the very last moment to realize the *Hyperion's* intentions. Most of them were busily engaged in looting their prize. Under this process five of the *Swallow's* nine boats had already been laden gunwale deep with the miscellaneous plunder already taken out of the American ship. Two of these laden small boats and two others of the *Swallow's* nine were crushed like eggshells as the *Hyperion* closed in and threw her grappling hooks.

Then, in a silence new and strange in Captain McMillin's previous experience in hand-to-hand fighting, his forty-eight black fighting men followed him over the rails and fell upon the pirates.

Within three minutes the American vessel's deck was a shambles. Camilla Maccartney's black myrmidons, like militant fiends from some strange hell of their own, their eyeballs rolling, their white teeth flashing as they bared their lips in the ecstasy of this mission of wholesale slaughter, spread irresistibly with grunts and low mutterings and strange cries about that deck.

Not a member of the pirate crew escaped their ruthless onslaught. Hard skulls were split asunder and lopped arms strewed the deck, and tough bodies were transfixed, and the gasping wounded were trampled lifeless in the terrible energy of these black fighting men.

Then abruptly, save for a harsh sobbing sound from laboring, panting lungs after their terrific exertion, a strange silence fell, and toward Captain McMillin, who stood well nigh aghast over the utter strangeness of this unprecedented carnage which had just taken place under his eye and under his command, there came a huge, black, diffidently smiling negro, his feet scarlet as he slouched along that moist and slippery deck, a crimson cutlass dangling loosely now from the red hand at the end of a red arm. This one, addressing the captain in a low, humble and deprecating voice, said—

"Come, now, please, me Marster—come, please sar, see de t'ree gentlemahn you is tell us to sabe alive!"

And Captain McMillin, bemused, followed this guide along that deck slushed and scarlet with the life blood of those pulped heaps which had been Captain Fawcett's pirate crew, stepped aft to where, behind the main deckhouse, three trussed and helpless white men lay out

upon a cleaner section of that vessel's deck, under the baleful eye of another strapping black man with red feet and a naked red cutlass brandished in a red hand.

The *Swallow,* her own somewhat blood soiled deck now shining spotless under the mighty holystonings it had received at the hands of its prize crew of twelve under the command of the *Hyperion's* second mate, the Danish flag now flying gaily from her masthead, followed the *Hyperion* into St. Thomas harbor on the second day of September, 1825. The two vessels came up to their designated anchorages smartly, and shortly thereafter, and for the last time, Saul Maccartney, accompanied by his crony, Captain Fawcett, and his colleague, the other pirate mate, was rowed ashore in the familiar longboat.

But during this short and rapid trip these three gentlemen did not, for once, occupy the sternsheets. They sat forward, their hands and feet in irons, the six oarsmen between them and Mr. Matthews, the *Hyperion's* mate, who held the tiller rope, and Captain the Honorable William McMillin, who sat erect beside him.

V

I HAVE already recorded my first horrified reaction to the appearance of the handsome black haired piratical mate whose painted arm my innocent thumbtack had penetrated. My next reaction, rather curiously, was the pressing, insistent, sudden impulse to withdraw that tack. I did so forthwith —with trembling fingers, I here openly confess.

My third and final reaction which came to me not long afterward and when I had somewhat succeeded in pulling myself together, was once more to get out my magnifying glass and take another good look through it. After all, I told myself, I was here confronted with nothing more in the way of material facts than a large sized, somewhat crudely done and very old oil painting.

I got the glass and reassured myself. The "blood" was, of course—as now critically examined, magnified by sixteen diameters—merely a few spattered drops of the very same vermilion pigment which my somewhat clever amateur artist had used for the red roofs of the houses, the foulards of the negresses and those many gloriously flaming flower blossoms.

Quite obviously these particular spatters of red paint had not been in the liquid state for more than a century. Having ascertained these facts beyond the shadow of any lingering doubt in the field of every day material fact, my one remaining bit of surviving wonderment settled itself about the minor puzzle of just why I had failed to observe these spots of ancient, dry, and brittle paint during the long and careful scrutiny to which I had subjected the picture the evening before. A curious coincidence, this—that the tiny red spots should happen to be precisely in the place where blood would be showing if it *had* flowed from my tack wound in that dangled painted arm.

I looked next, curiously, through my glass at the fellow's face. I could perceive now none of that acutely agonized expression which had accentuated my first startled horror at the sight of the blood.

And so, pretty well reassured, I went back to my bedroom and finished dressing. And thereafter, as the course of affairs proceeded, I could not get the thing out of my mind. I will pass over any attempt at describing the psychological processes involved and say here merely that by the end of a couple of weeks or so I was in that state of obsession which made it impossible for me to do my regular work, or, indeed, to think of anything else. And then, chiefly to relieve my mind of this vastly annoying preoccupation, I began upon that course of investigatory research to

which I have already alluded.

When I had finished this, had gone down to the end of the last bypath which it involved, it was well on in the year 1930. It had taken three years, and —it was worth it.

I was in St. Thomas that season and St. Thomas was still operating under the régime which had prevailed since the spring of 1917, at which time the United States had purchased the old Danish West Indies from Denmark as a war measure, during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.

In 1930 our naval forces had not yet withdrawn from our Virgin Island Colony. The administration was still actively under the direction of his Excellency Captain Waldo Evans, U. S. N. Retired, and the heads of the major departments were still the efficient and personable gentlemen assigned to those duties by the Secretary of the Navy.

My intimate friend, Dr. Pelletier, the pride of the U. S. N. Medical Corps, was still in active charge of the Naval Hospital, and I could rely upon Dr. Pelletier, whose interest in and knowledge of the strange and *outré* beliefs, customs and practises of numerous strange corners of this partly civilized world of ours were both deep and, as it seemed to me, virtually exhaustive.

To this good friend of mine, this walking encyclopedia of strange knowledge, I took, naturally, my findings in this very strange and utterly fascinating story of old St. Thomas. We spent several long evenings together over it, and when I had imparted all the facts while my surgeon friend listened, as is his custom, for hours on end without a single interruption, we proceeded to spend many more evenings discussing it, sometimes at the hospitable doctor's bachelor dinner table and afterward far into those tropic nights of spice and balm, and sometimes at my house which is quite near the old T. L. Maccartney mansion on Denmark Hill.

In the course of these many evenings I added to the account of the affair which had emerged out of my long investigation two additional phases of this matter which I have not included in my account as written out here because, in the form which these took in my mind, they were almost wholly conjectural.

Of these, the first took its point of departure from the depiction of the rope, as shown in the painting, with which Saul Maccartney had been hanged. I have mentioned the painstaking particularity with which the artist had put in the minor details of the composition. I have illustrated this by stating that the seven traditional turns of the hangman's knot were to be seen showing plainly under Captain Fawcett's left ear. The same type of knot, I may add here, was also painted in laboriously upon the noose which had done to death Fawcett's other mate.

But Saul Maccartney's rope did not show such a knot. In fact, it showed virtually no knot at all. Even under the magnifying glass a knot expert would have been unable to name in any category of knots the inconspicuous slight enlargement at the place where Saul Maccartney's noose was joined. Another point about this rope which might or might not have any significance, was the fact that it was of a color slightly but yet distinctly different from the hemp color of the other two. Saul Maccartney's rope was of a faint greenish blue color.

Upon this rather slight basis for conjecture I hazarded the following enlargement:

That Camilla Maccartney, just after the verdict of the Danish Colonial High Court had become known to her—and I ventured to express the belief that she had known it before any other white person—had said in her quiet voice to her black butler, Jens Sorensen:

"I am going to Ma Folie. Tonight, at nine o'clock precisely, Ajax Mendoza is to come to me there."

And—this is merely my imaginative supplement, it will be remembered,

based on my own knowledge of the dark ways of Voodoo—burly black Ajax Mendoza, capital executioner in the honorable employ of the Danish Colonial Administration, whose father, Jupiter Mendoza, had held that office before him, and whose grandfather, Achilles Mendoza, (whose most notable performance had been the racking of the insurrectionist leader, Black Tancrède, who had been brought back to the capital in chains after the perpetration of his many atrocities in the St. Jan Uprising of the slaves in 1733), had been the first of the line; that Ajax Mendoza, not fierce and truculent as he looked standing there beside the policemaster on Captain Fawcett's gallow platform, but trembling and cringing, had kept that appointment to which he had been summoned.

Having received his orders, he had then hastened to bring to Camilla Maccartney the particular length of thin manila rope which was later to be strung from the arm of Saul Maccartney's gallows and had left it with her until she returned it to him before the hour of the execution; and that he had received it back and reeved it through its pulley with even more fear and trembling and cringings at being obliged to handle this transmuted thing whose very color was a terror and a distress to him, now that it had passed through that fearsome laboratory of "white missy who knew the Snake . . ."

AND my second conjectural hypothesis I based upon the fact which my research had revealed to me that all the members of the honorable clan of Maccartney resident in St. Thomas had, with obvious propriety, kept to their closely shuttered several residences during the entire day of that public execution. That is, all of the Maccartneys except the heiress of the great Maccartney fortune, Camilla.

Half an hour before high noon on that public holiday the English barouche had deposited Camilla Maccartney at one of the wharves a little away from the center of the town where that great throng had gathered to see the pirates hanged, and from there she had been rowed out to the small vessel which had that morning gone back to its old anchorage near the shore.

There, in her old place under the awning of the afterdeck, she had very calmly and deliberately set up her easel and placed before her the all but finished panorama upon which she had been working, and had thereupon begun to paint, and so had continued quietly painting until the three bodies of those pirates which had been left dangling "for the space of a whole hour", according to the sentence, "as a salutary example", and had then ended her work and gone back to the wharf carrying carefully the now finished panorama to where the English barouche awaited her.

By conjecture, on the basis of these facts, I managed somehow to convey to Dr. Pelletier, a man whose mind is attuned to such matters, the tentative, uncertain idea—I should not dare to name it a conviction—that Camilla Maccartney, by some application of that uncanny skill of her in the arts of darkness, had as it were, caught the life principle of her cousin, Saul Maccartney, as it escaped from his splendid body there at the end of that slightly discolored and curiously knotted rope, *and fastened it down upon her canvas within the simulacrum of that little painted figure through the arm of which I had thrust a thumbtack!*

These two queer ideas of mine, which had been knocking about inside my head, strangely enough did not provoke the retort, "Outrageous!" from Dr. Pelletier, a man of the highest scientific attainments. I had hesitated to put such thoughts into words, and I confess that I was surprised that his response in the form of a series of nods of the head did not seem to indicate the indulgence of a normal mind toward the drivelings of some imbecile.

Dr. Pelletier deferred any verbal reply to this imaginative climax of mine, placed as it was at the very end of our discussion. When he did shift his mighty bulk where it reclined in my Chinese rattan lounge chair on my airy west gallery—a sure preliminary to any remarks from him—his first words surprised me a little.

"Is there any doubt, Canevin, in your mind about the identity of this painted portrait figure of the mate with Saul Maccartney himself?"

"No," said I. "I was able to secure two faded old ambrotypes of Saul Maccartney—at least, I was given a good look at them. There can, I think, be no question on that score."

For the space of several minutes Pelletier remained silent. Then he slightly shifted his leonine head to look at me.

"Canevin," said he, "people like you and me who have *seen* this kind of thing working under our very eyes, all around us, among people like these West Indian blacks, well— we *know*."

Then, more animatedly, and sitting up a little in his chair, the doctor said:

"On that basis, Canevin—on the pragmatic basis, if you will, and that, God knows, is scientific, based on observation—the only thing that we can do is to give this queer, devilish thing the benefit of the doubt. Our doubt, to say nothing of what the general public would think of such ideas!"

"Should you say that there is anything that can be done about it?" I inquired. "I have the picture, you know, and you have heard the—well, the *facts* as they have come under my observation. Is there any—what shall I say?—any *responsibility* involved on the basis of those facts and any conjectural additions that you and I may choose to make?"

"That," said Pelletier, "is what I meant by the benefit of the doubt. Thinking about this for the moment in terms of the limitations, the incompleteness, of human knowledge and the short distance we have managed to travel along the road of civilization, I should say that there is—a responsibility."

"What shall I do—if anything?" said I, a little taken aback at this downrightness.

Again Dr. Pelletier looked at me for a long moment, and nodded his head several times. Then:

"Burn the thing, Canevin. Fire—the solvent. Do you comprehend me? Have I said enough?"

I thought over this through the space of several silent minutes. Then, a trifle hesitantly because I was not at all sure that I had grasped the implications which lay below this very simple suggestion—

"You mean—?"

"That if there is anything in it, Canevin—that benefit of the doubt again, you see—if, to put such an outrageous hypothesis into a sane phrase, the life, the soul, the personality remains unreleased, and that because of Camilla Maccartney's use of a pragmatic 'magical' skill such as is operative today over there in the hills of Haiti; to name only one focus of this particular *cultus*— well, then . . ."

This time it was I who nodded; slowly, several times. After that I sat quietly in my chair for long minutes in the little silence which lay between us. We had said, it seemed to me, everything that was to be said. I—we—had gone as far as human limitations permitted in the long investigation of this strange affair. Then I summoned my houseman, Stephen Penn.

"Stephen," said I, "go and find out if the charcoal pots in the kitchen have burned out since breakfast. I imagine that about this time there would be a little charcoal left to burn out in each of them. If so, put all the charcoal into one pot and bring it out here on the gallery. If not, fix me a new charcoal fire in the largest pot. Fill it about half full."

"Yes, sar," said Stephen, and departed on this errand.

WITHIN three minutes the excellent Stephen was back. He set down on the tile floor beside my chair the largest of my four kitchen charcoal pots. It was half full of brightly glowing embers. I sent him away before I went into the house to fetch the painting. It is a curious fact that this faithful servitor of mine, a *zambo* or medium brown negro, and a native of St. Thomas, had manifested an increasing aversion to anything like contact with or even sight of the old picture, an aversion dating from that afternoon when he had discovered it, three years before, in the lumber room of my Santa Crucian hired residence.

Then I brought it out and laid it flat, after clearing a place for it, on the large plain table which stands against the wall of the house on my gallery. Pelletier came over and stood beside me, and in silence we looked long and searchingly at Camilla Maccartney's panorama for the last time.

Then, with the sharp, small blade of my pocketknife, I cut it cleanly through again and again until it was in seven or eight strips. A little of the brittle old paint cracked and flaked off in this process. Having piled the strips one on top of another, I picked up the topmost of the three or four spread newspapers which I had placed under the canvas to save the table top from my knife point, and these flakes and chips I poured first off the newspapers' edge upon the glowing embers. These bits of dry, ancient pigment hissed, flared up, and then quickly melted away. Then I burned the strips very carefully until all but one were consumed.

This, perhaps because of some latent dramatic instinct whose existence until that moment I had never really suspected, was the one containing the figure of Saul Maccartney. I paused, the strip in my hand, and looked at Pelletier. His face was inscrutable. He nodded his head at me, however, as though to encourage me to proceed and finish my task.

With perhaps a trifle of extra care I inserted the end of this last strip into the charcoal pot.

It caught fire and began to burn through precisely as its predecessors had caught and burned, and finally disintegrated into a light grayish ash. Then a very strange thing happened—

There was no slightest breath of air moving in that sheltered corner of the gallery. The entire solid bulk of the house shelterd it from the steady northeast trade—now at three in the afternoon at its lowest daily ebb, a mere wavering, tenuous pulsing.

And yet, at the precise instant when the solid material of that last strip had been transmuted by the power of the fire into the whitish, wavering ghost of material objects which we name ash —from the very center of the still brightly glowing charcoal embers there arose a thin, delicate wisp of greenish blue smoke which spiraled before our eyes under the impact of some obscure pulsation in the quiet air about us, then stiffened, as yet unbroken, into a taut vertical line, the upper end of which abruptly turned, curving down upon itself, completing the representation of the hangman's noose; and then, instantly, this contour wavered and broke and ceased to be, and all that remained there before our fascinated eyes was a kitchen charcoal pot containing a now rapidly dulling mass of rose colored embers.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A COMMUNICATION from a Pennsylvania coal-miner, which presents an interesting question in animal psychology:

Avoca, Pennsylvania

Whenever rats are mentioned during the course of conversation among any group of people they are immediately associated with something to be exterminated as destructive vermin. The U. S. Dept. of Agriculture estimates the yearly damage wrought by rodents at $2,000,000. This to the farmers alone. I stand corrected if my figures are wrong.

Yet nowhere is the rat protected with greater care except perhaps in the research laboratories of our scientists than in the coal mines of Pennsylvania, especially in the anthracite regions, where they abound in large numbers and are given every encouragement to propagate. It may sound strange and many readers will be skeptical, but nevertheless it is true. In the underground labryinths and dark caverns deep in the bowls of the earth where the coal diggers eke out a precarious living, rats have played an important part in the safety of the miners while they are engaged in their daily labors.

Labors beset with dangers on every hand regardless of how careful a miner may be to protect himself. The most common accident which befalls the mine worker and one which takes a large toll of lives annually is caused by mine caves. In places where the coal has been removed, the usual procedure is to make the place safe for working it by fortifying the roof of the mine with timber procured from nearby forests.

You may wonder what all this has to do with rats. I will tell you.

CALL it instinct, call it a sixth sense, that unexplained something all animals are supposed to possess, but when there is a tremendous pressure on the supporting timber used in sustaining the roof of a mine there will be a general exodus of rats from that immediate vicinity several hours before a cave-in occurs; and any experienced miner, when he witnesses such a phenomenon, will immediately remove his tools and retire to a place of safety,

warning all other workers with whom he comes in contact on his way to the surface.

Not infrequently he returns the following day to find his chamber, as his particular place in the mine is known, to be filled with hundreds of tons of débris as the result of a devastating cave-in extending over a large area. Is it any wonder that rats are protected by the miner?

How can their strange behavior be explained and accounted for? It has been said that rats will desert a sinking ship. Humans will desert one also because they have been forewarned, but it has always been a mystery to me just why rats will scurry to a place of safety hours before a mineworker has the slightest intimation of danger. It is not an uncommon sight to see a miner feeding a number of rats at the time he is eating his lunch, and in one particular place where I take coal from the miner by means of an electric engine, he tells me he has identified the same rat in his place over a period of half a dozen years.

—FRANK BOONE

RECENTLY we have received several complaints about the binding of our magazine. Without exception these letters have come from readers in the Far South and in the Tropics. Evidently the new flexible glue we have been lately using, with the hope of avoiding the cracking "hard" glue is subject to, will not stand up in very warm climates. Beginning with the July 1st issue, therefore, we shall avoid this difficulty once for all by using staples for *Adventure*. We are sorry that the change that we hoped was for the better should have caused any of you inconvenience.

A NOTE on the sources of primitive medicine:

Evanston, Illinois

May I add a bit of documentary evidence in support of Mr. A. George's thesis (Camp-fire, June 1st issue) of an ancient origin for the medical learning of African witch-doctors? That there was available from early times a great store of such learning is evident to any one who has gone over a number of ancient records.

Waterman's "Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire." Vol. I, p.15f, Letter 19, contains this interesting bit. It is addressed to King Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) and is obviously in answer to an inquiry on the part of that ruler. The writer is of that group of individuals who at the same time fulfilled the duties of physician, priest, astrologer, governor, architect, and often general. His name was Marduk-Shakin-Shum, which means, translated freely, "Gift of the God Marduk", and he lived in Harran, whence Abraham came to Canaan.

An extract from his letter follows:

"The King, my Lord, has spoken, saying, 'The burning is unendurable; tell us quickly what we shall do.'

" 'It is not a real burning, and as a remedy for it let them make a cold application.' "

—ALLEN D. ALBERT, JR.

While on this subject, herewith apologies for a slip made in the heading for Mr. George's letter. The statement "solutions made from cinchona bark (yielding aspirin)", should have read "yielding quinine", of course.—ED.

E. A. BRININSTOOL, whose articles about the Old West have appeared in our pages on numerous occasions, rises up before the 'Fire to have his say in our current discussion of Custer and the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Los Angeles, California

I was interested in reading the account in a recent issue of your magazine written by William Wells. He mentions the book "Buffalo Days" which was written by my old friend, Col. H. W. Wheeler, who lived in my family for the last 10 years of his life, and issued this book while living with me.

I am not going to scrap with Mr. Wells in regard to Sitting Bull, although I do agree with him that he took no part in the Custer fight.

Mr. Wells says that Sitting Bull may have fought against Reno and afterward against the combined forces of Reno and Benteen, but I do not agree with him. I do not think he was in any part of the fighting. I don't even agree that he was "with the women and children, making medicine."

NOW let's take up that part where Mr. Wells claims that "Reno could have held on there (in the timber) till hell froze over." That he "had his reserve ammunition." It is quite apparent that Mr. Wells isn't particularly well posted on that phase of the battle, or rather, that he doesn't know what he is talking about. Why? Listen:

Reno was not "driven into a bend in the river." He took that position of his own free will; further, there was timber there where the horses of the command were, for the time, fairly well sheltered and protected. Reno had just 112 men with him, twenty of whom were the 'Ree scouts who went with his command. *From 30 to 40% of Reno's men, were raw, green recruits*—as were, in fact, that per cent of the entire 7th Cavalry on that expedition, according to

Gen. Godfrey's *Century* article of 1892. Raw recruits! Facing wild Indians for the first time, probably—poor shots, poor horsemen, doubtless scared stiff—and with little wonder.

CUSTER had ordered Reno to make the initial attack, *promising to support him with his (Custer's) five troops.* Mark that well, you readers of the Custer fight. Did Custer keep that promise? *He did not!* Without even sending word to Reno, he goes off down the river over 4 miles, *on the opposite side of the stream,* with banks from 40 to 60 feet sheer up and down; no way to cross except at the lower end near that portion of the Indian village. What Custer's intentions were, nobody knows, except from pure guess-work. Doubtless he intended to attack the lower end of the village. If such was his intent, he did not communicate it to any of his subordinate commanders at the time he started—not indeed until he sent Trumpeter Martin back to Benteen, miles and miles out of reach. *And there by Custer's own orders,* mind you.

Reno's men were supplied with 50 rounds of rifle ammunition, with an additional 50 rounds in their saddle-pockets; also with 24 rounds of pistol ammunition. The 50 rounds in the saddle-bags was the "reserve" of which Mr. Wells speaks. The *main supply* of ammunition was with the pack-train, under Capt. McDougal, *miles in the rear of Benteen's command,* and also there *by Custer's orders.* Those pack mules carried 24,000 extra rounds, none of which was available to either Custer or Reno, and none of which could have been available because of the position of Benteen, who was (so he says in his testimony at the Reno Inquiry) "all of 15 miles away" when at the farthest point before he backtracked into the main trail, after finding no Indians —which Custer evidently thought he would bump into. Benteen was ordered to "look for a valley". If he found no Indians he was to continue on "for another valley". In fact, Benteen says he was evidently sent out "valley hunting," not Indian hunting.

"Why I was sent," says Benteen, "I never could understand, when everybody knew that right ahead of us were already more Indians than we could well handle. However that was not for me to criticize. I was ordered to the left, and there I went."

RENO has been vilified, abused, called a coward and what not, by writers who don't know what they are talking about, and who plainly have never visited the field or got a slant on the situation. Reno was *left to his fate by Custer—deserted,* cut off and surrounded, with his little pitiful handful of 92 men, as the 20 'Ree scouts skeddadled at the first fire of the Sioux. He has been called a coward because he didn't charge that Indian village of over 3500 fighting warriors with his puny force, and keep right on through it to Custer, four miles away and on the other side of the river!

And Mr. Wells claims Reno could have "held on there till hell froze over," because he had his "reserve ammunition!"

Listen, Mr. Wells: Colonel Chas. A. Varnum, who was a lieutenant in that battle, with the Reno forces, told me this:

"When we reached the bluffs, *we didn't average five cartridges to the man.*" Suppose they HAD stayed in the timber "until hell froze over". Would they have been there yet? You tell!

Here is the testimony of Lieut. Hare:

"If Reno had continued to advance, mounted, I don't think he would have got a man through. *The column would not have lasted five minutes.* His dismounting and deploying was all that saved us. Major Reno stayed in the timber *till all hope of support from Custer had vanished.* I think the reason we left was because if we stayed much longer—say 20 minutes—we *could not have gotten out at all.*"

YET Mr. Wells insists that Major Reno "lost courage!" I insist that Major Reno showed darned good sense in getting out of there while the getting was fairly good. True, he lost 29 men before he reached the bluffs; but that was far better than remaining there and losing them ALL. It was Major Reno's sound common sense that saved what was left of the command that fought in the river bottom. Of that charge to the bluffs—for it *was* a charge, and *not* a mad, scrambling retreat—Hare further says:

"If the command had been pursued by the 1000 Indians who were about us, we would all have been killed. *It would not have lasted ten minutes!*"

The dozen or fifteen men who were left behind were, for the most part, able to cross the river and rejoin the command on the bluffs that night. One might infer from Mr. Wells' article that *all* of these men were killed.

MR. WELLS says that Custer "supposed" Benteen would arrive, "bringing plenty of ammunition". Mr. Wells is evidently laboring under the impression that Benteen had the reserve ammunition with him. The reserve ammunition was with the packtrain under the command of Capt. McDougal and Lieut. Mathey, all of which was some miles *in the rear of Benteen,* and not under his orders at all. Why Custer sent that note: "Come on; bring packs" to Benteen, is unfathomable, inasmuch as Custer *knew* that Benteen didn't have charge of it. Custer knew it was with the packs—and both Benteen and the packs were where they were *by Custer's own orders.*

His great error—as plain as the nose on one's face—was in splitting his command into three separate battalions, none of which was within supporting distance of the other when so badly wanted, and with *all* of the reserve ammunition (except that carried by the men into action) on the backs of those pack mules.

MR. WELLS now says: "Benteen meantime had joined Reno, who being senior, took command, *and refused to obey Custer's order to Benteen.*" Let us stop right there and take a survey of the situation.

Reno's men had been reduced to "less than five cartridges to the man," says Col. Varnum. True, Benteen's men had all of their ammunition, 100 rounds per man. Reno had many wounded men; it took *six* men to carry each wounded man in a saddle-blanket—at least six were used. Suppose Reno and Benteen had at once moved down toward where they supposed Custer was, without waiting for the extra ammunition to come up? Reno's men with practically empty guns! And burdened with those wounded men! What a neat little pickle they would have been in as soon as they struck that horde of Sioux who were between them and Custer hill!

Is Mr. Wells aware of the fact that it was *nearly an hour* after Benteen joined Reno before that pack-train with the extra ammunition came up? Says Benteen, in his official testimony:

"I am convinced that when the order brought by Martin reached me, Gen. Custer and his whole command were dead. From the orders I started out with, he could not possibly have known where to find me within ten or fifteen miles. As it was, I was certainly too far to cooperate with Custer when he wanted us."

And Benteen was right where he was by Custer's own orders!

"YET Reno," says Mr. Wells, "sat there scared to death, in full view, and hearing of Custer's fight not three miles away and would not go to his assistance."

What with, Mr. Wells? *With empty guns?*

Reno *did* move down toward Custer just as soon as that precious ammunition arrived and was distributed—moved with a bunch of wounded men, each of whom had to be carried by six of their comrades! Benteen says he was convinced that Custer was wiped out by the time Martin arrived with the message. Reno went about one mile, and was then driven back to the original position on the bluffs, absolutely surrounded by thousands of yelling, victorious Sioux.

"ARMY officers," says Mr. Wells, "including Gen. Miles have estimated that Reno, leaving a sufficient guard with the pack-train and the wounded, could, in between 30 and 40 minutes, have struck the rear of the Indians on that side of Custer with over 300 men." All Miles knows is what he has been told. He wasn't there.

Three hundred men—30 to 40 per cent raw, green recruits, against over 3500 trained fighting warriors, far better armed in every way, and far better led—led by Indian leaders who knew every inch of the ground they were contesting on! How long, Mr. Wells, would *that* scrap have lasted? The Indians state that they cleaned Custer up inside of half an hour. Custer had about 225 men—the exact number is not known. Three hundred against fully 3500! Ye gods!

What folly to think for one minute that 300 men—or several times that number—could have won the day at the Little Big Horn on the 25th and 26th of June, 1876!

MR. WELLS says that Reno "stayed on the hill *entrenched*." What behind, Mr. Wells? The only "entrenching" that was done was with knives and tin cups, mostly; there were three spades in the Reno command. There wasn't enough shelter for those men to hide their bodies even—nothing but tiny little piles of dirt, hastily scratched and dug out of the flinty, sun baked sod.

There wasn't an iota of evidence brought out at the Reno Inquiry that even hinted that Reno "was a coward". On the contrary there is plenty of proof that he was the exact opposite—proof by the column which I can supply any one interested. The fact that the Reno Inquiry's decision was that "no further proceedings in this case are necessary, and "there was nothing in Major Reno's conduct that requires the animadversion of this court," is evidence enough that Major Reno acted wisely and prudently.

Who then was to blame for Custer's defeat? Custer himself and nobody else; by his separation of his command; by his disobeying Terry's orders *not* to arrive in the Valley of the Little Big Horn before the 26th; by his refusal to believe his scouts when they told him he would find more Indians than he could handle; by putting the packs and reserve ammunition in a position where it was miles away when so badly needed. It was a "Custer blunder" from start to finish.

—E. A. BRININSTOOL

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

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Exploration

GETTING acquainted with Africa on a one-man expedition.

Request:—"Before I launch into explanations and questions perhaps a bit of autobiography to show my ability to carry out my plans may not be amiss. I am 31. In 1916 at the age of 16 I was a revolutionist with Pancho Villa in Mexico. In 1918 with the A. E. F. August 1921 I left Bogota, Colombia, alone with three donkeys, crossed the Andes and emerged 22 months later (after living 14 months with a tribe of headhunters on the Rio Guaniere) into the Orinoco River. In '26, '27 engaged in 3 revolutions; in 1929 spent 5½ months hiking alone through Portuguese East Africa and S. W. Rhodesia. August to December 1930 hobnobbed with Chinese bandits in western Shensi province of China. Can take care of myself anywhere.

I plan to attempt to ascend the Ubangi River (northern Congo), try to follow the Uella or Uella Mukwa river, cross the Niam Niam and emerge down the Nile. I plan to go alone, except, of course, overland, and will travel in an 18-foot square-stern folding canvas canoe (with sail, when possible). Time absolutely no object.

1. Will land from ocean steamer at Matadi. How far up on my route can I go by steamboat or mechanical boats?

2. What, generally, is the natives' attitude toward white men along this route? Or have white men passed so often as to be quite ordinary spectacles?

3. Would authorities (if any) object to my method of travel—possibly for lowering the white man's prestige or any other reason?"

—L. V. CUMMINGS, New York City

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—In Africa, and that means in this case most of the parts you wish to visit, no traffic lights have as yet been installed on the busy corners, nor

is traffic quite as congested as on Times Square or Fifth Avenue, but means of transportation to most any place and communications between these places are quite varied and plentiful; you could, for instance, cover the route you wish to travel by rail, steamer, native or other sailing craft and finally by motorcars and motorbuses and end up on one of the White Nile steamers at Rejaf or Juba in the South and reach Khartoum, farther north, without ever lacking ordinary comforts and even some small luxuries during your trip. While there are in the Sudd (the marshes and swamps along the bed of the upper White Nile and in Lake No) and in one or two other places some 35,000 square miles of unexplored regions left, "dark, unexplored Africa" has passed into history. Besides the Sudd, there are a few other places which are not only surrounded by and situated in the heart of deserts, requiring many weeks of desert trek, but none offer any attractions to travelers and therefore are of no interest to you.

1. It may not do any harm to remember that most African rivers are plentifully supplied with rapids and cataracts, requiring portage in a country where it is more than sufficiently hot without inviting extra exertions. However, portages mean native labor, and it is often extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to secure native porters, not because there is, necessarily, any lack of them but for reason of the African's peculiar mentality which causes him, if he happens to be too indolent or temporarily too prosperous, to refuse work of any sort and you probably are aware that the British, in particular, and the Belgians, too, are what other whites often consider as too anxious and too considerate of the poor natives' so-called independence and rights, irrespective of a white man's needs.

ARRIVING in Matadi, 150 kilometers from the mouth of the Congo by ocean steamer, you can take train to Kanshasa—2 days—then steamer to Iribu on the confluence of the Congo and the Mobangi or Ubangi River—3 days—from then on you can sail your boat until you reach the Welle or Uelle River on your right (south) and follow this to Faraje from where you can—in 6 days—by motor, via Dungu, Yei, etc., reach Rejaf on the White Nile and, going north by your own boat or river steamer (Sudan Government steamers) get to Khartoum. Now, all this sounds perfectly logical and easy but, knowing the African rivers as I do, I would seriously advise you to watch out for hippos while on the water and for both hippos and crocs while you are traveling through the Sudd, where there are no landing places, villages, birds or beasts ashore.

You would have to subsist entirely on whatever you can manage to carry in the boat; you can not make a fire ashore, because the shore is nothing but swamp and nightly visited by hippos who, being provided by nature with the necessary weight and momentum, try to break through the Sudd vegetation here and there and might easily wipe out your little camp without any malice aforethought. You will not see a living being for many days—meaning a human; you may encounter one or more of the Nile steamers going up or downstream and anchored to a number of barges, attached to them, to prevent them from being blown over when one of the sudden sandstorms, called *habub,* and originating in one of the far-off deserts, arises.

WHERE the papyrus and elephant grass narrow along the rivershore, you may see up to several hundreds of deer, elephants, some lions and leopards (I myself shot an elephant there) but do not try to follow them for a shot, because the ground is extremely treacherous and, in case of an attack, almost fatal.

Between Shambe and Bor grass fires are frequent in February and March and let me tell you that they are extremely dangerous; on my last trip downriver on one of the Nile steamers, our steamer just barely escaped being burned. Take a tip and board one of the Nile steamers in Rejaf and travel down toward Khartoum; you will enjoy it better, have fairly decent food, service, drinks, sometimes ice and a regular cabin and bed to sleep in, and after your trip in the Congo, you will appreciate whatever comforts are obtainable. From Khartoum, take the railroad down to Wadi Halfa from where you can proceed by boat or rail to Cairo; or use the Cook's steamers, if you do not mind paying two and three times the price of what your purchase is worth.

THE Sudan government maintains a Travel Bureau in the Grand Hotel at Khartoum, and if you mention my name to the manager he will do his best to assist you in any way. Between Khartoum and Cairo there are 6 cataracts which should cure any one anxious to travel along the Nile; however, that is up to you, and the *fellahin* are always willing to give you a hand with portage or anything else for a small *douceur.* If you wish to see the country and the wonderful remains of antiquity, take the train to Wadi Halfa, the boat to Shellal and the train from there to Cairo.

2. Whites are now encountered almost everywhere and are quite an ordinary spectacle to the negro. The latter's attitude in towns and villages, where there are a number of whites, is respectful and obedient, but it does not follow that, where whites are few or all alone, or far from established centers of authority, the native does not take advantage of circumstances and conditions by stealing, refusing to work and, in a few cases, violence, if he thinks he has a chance to get away with it. This is, of course, aggravated in the case of a white who does not speak the native idiom.

3. No, they would not care how you travel, as long as you do not lower the white man's dig-

nity by intimate association with natives, male or female, etc. Also it is taken for granted that a white man will not deliberately enter, stay in, or cross forbidden territory or game preserves, will avoid such locations which are closed on account of sleeping sickness, etc.

I TAKE it you wish to get acquainted with Africa more than to sail a boat, which you can do anywhere. If this assumption is correct, make up a party of two or three or go alone and engage the services of some white man on the spot whom you can trust, who speaks one or more of the native idioms and who, in case of need, can stand back to back with you and fight it out; who can nurse you when you are down with any of the African diseases, whom you can talk to and know him to be intelligent enough to understand your meaning and to assume leadership when you are not able to.

West

PESSIMISTIC note on the Chuckwalla Valley.

Request:—"I would greatly appreciate information on the Chuckwalla Valley region of Southern California. Weather conditions; forests, mountains, etc; animal inhabitants. Also camping conditions."

—DAN M. GISH, Peoria, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—The Chuckwalla Valley is part of the Colorado Desert. The only forest it holds is scattering clumps of what are known as Joshua trees, ragged looking monstrosities with branches like ugly clubs—rough, scraggy things of unbelievable ugliness and of no value for any known purpose—and they with cactus make up the principal vegetation.

The animals consist of coyotes, the little pigmy wolves that are smarter than foxes, snakes, some skunks and badgers and a few horned toads and occasional prairie dogs.

Camping conditions are such as one would get on a rough and rocky lake shore with no water to drink or any chance for food in Winter, an occasional rain in the Summer, intense heat and aridity. In short, it is desert of the rougher sort. There is no single thing to commend it.

Tarpon

IT'S a whale of a thrill to see the silver king leap in the moonlight.

Request:—"1. I would like to get some tarpon fishing. Would like some such arrangement as they have at the pier at Miami. That is, some one who for a flat fee would take me out and would supply everything, tackle, etc.

Have done some fishing down there. Have taken marlin up to 100 pounds, barracuda, etc, but never any tarpon. What would be the best time of year to come?

2. What town or city would be best to go to to get what I want?"

—J. L. JOHNSON, M. D., Bangor, Maine

Reply, by Mr. Hapsburg Liebe:—1. Am no authority on tarpon fishing, although I've done some. Here on the Gulf coast we're sort of prone to consider the night of the full moon in May, if it comes late in the month, or the night of the full moon in June, if it comes early in the month, the peak of the tarpon season. I've caught a few in March, more in April, still more in both May and June, if my memory serves me correctly. To tell you the truth, I've sat in boats and fought mosquitos so many nights, and caught nothing but sharks when I wanted to catch tarpon, that I'm not especially hot on fishing for tarpon. But they're chain lightning on a hook; no getting away from that. These fish would probably run earlier at Miami than here, since it is farther down and warmer. I would choose Miami as the best place to go for fishing in March. If the fishing wasn't good there, I'd make inquiry as to the fishing at Key West, or one or another of the fishing camps in the Keys.

2. You can find competent guides and first class cruisers in Miami, of course. Tackle and bait are furnished, but most of the "big" fishermen prefer to use tackle of their own. The cost would be anywhere from $20 a day up, depending upon reputation of the guide, rush of business, how long you wanted to fish—how many days—etc. Ordinarily, two may fish at once. Most guides will carry a party of four.

It is not absolutely necessary to do your tarpon fishing at night, you know. But there really is a whale of a thrill in seeing the silver king leap and flash in the moonlight.

Belgium

A TELEPHONE conversation in Antwerp reveals a ticklish political situation.

Request:—"1. Are the Belgian—particularly the Antwerp—telephone operators French-speaking? My French is not so bad, and in France I have no great difficulty. But I wondered whether these operators speak Dutch, German, or possibly Flemish? It really didn't sound like French.

2. Are the operators men or women?"

—M. P. KNOX, Springfield, Missouri

Reply, by Mr. J. D. Newsom:—1. Telephone operators in Belgium are civil servants. Allegedly they are bilingual. There is a law to that effect. All civil servants are required to speak French and Flemish. But the French-speaking Walloons

despise the Flemings, and the Flemings loathe the Walloons which, of course, is what one has to contend with in a country whose motto is, *"l'Union c'est la Force"*. The situation has been growing steadily worse since the close of the war of 1914-1918, for the Walloons, proud of their French origin, have made the Flemings eat humble pie. Humble pie seems to be highly indigestible. It causes the worst kind of political nightmares, among others the separatist nightmare which, some day, will split Belgium wide open. The strength of the separatist movement centers in and around Antwerp where, just to show how truculent they were feeling, the electors sent a traitor, undergoing a life sentence, to represent them in the Chamber of Deputies. Eulenspiegel is not dead yet.

And that brings us back to telephone operators in a rather roundabout way. They may be civil servants, but they are not free from racial prejudice. All through Flanders they dislike being spoken to in French. They will answer you, but they'll probably snap your head off, and you may get the wrong number, particularly if your accent, over the telephone, leads them to believe you are one of their own kind trying to put on side. Belgium-French has an unmistakable accent of its own which, to French ears, is somewhat provincial, not to say rustic. Furthermore, certain archaic idioms, long since fallen into desuetude in France, are still in current usage in Belgium. In French the figure "seventy" is *"soixante-dix"*; across the border, even among Walloons, it is called *"septente"*. "Ninety" in French is *"quatre-vingt-dix"*; in Belgium *"nonente"*.

2. Most of the operators are women. In some post offices, however, a male clerk is sometimes in charge of the *cabine téléphonique.*

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. *It is in no sense an employment bureau.*
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products; economic possibilities; distribution; exploration, etc. No questions on employment.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care of Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration work, advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman, rate clerk, General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ripon, Wisconsin.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery: tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R. (Retired), 442 Forty-ninth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Federal Investigative Activities *Secret Service; Immigration Patrol Inspector, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

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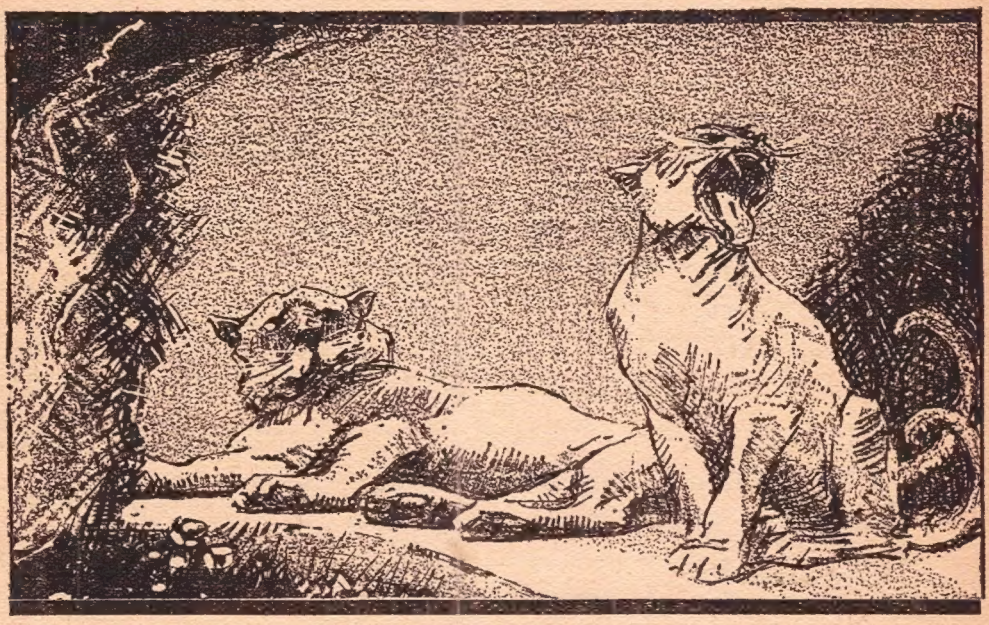

White Tigers

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